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SCIENCE FICTION

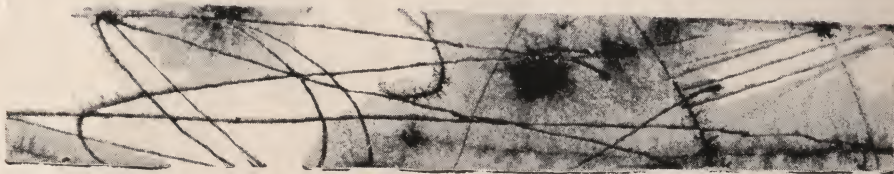
Edited by FREDERIK POHL





THIS FIRST ISSUE of *Star Science Fiction* magazine is produced by the combination of talents that collaborated to make the *Ballantine Books* line of science-fiction novels and collections the leading factor in science-fiction book publishing today.

IAN BALLANTINE, *Star's* publisher, is the president of *Ballantine Books*, publishers of such award-winning successes as Theodore Sturgeon's *More Than Human*, Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End* and many more—with such wonders to come as James Blish's full-length novel, *A Case of Conscience* and a dozen others scheduled for the coming year.



FREDERIK POHL, *Star's* editor, has edited nearly a dozen anthologies—including the *Star* series of originals from which this magazine is a logical development. He is also the author of more than a dozen other books, including *Slave Ship* and *The Case Against Tomorrow*, *The Space Merchants* and *Wolfbane* (with C. M. Kornbluth), the James Eden series of science-fiction juveniles (with Jack Williamson), etc.

RICHARD POWERS, *Star's* art director, has done nearly all the *Ballantine Books* science-fiction covers. He is well known for oils and washes of New England scenes; he has had two one-man exhibitions in New York galleries, with more to come.



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Star

SCIENCE FICTION JAN. 1958

Editor FREDERIK POHL • Art director RICHARD POWERS

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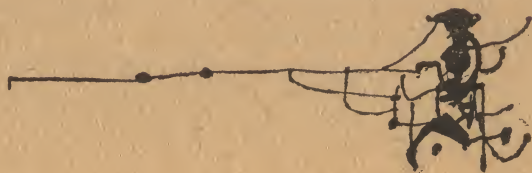
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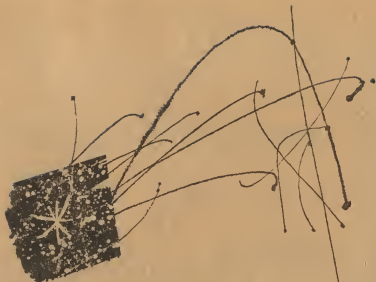
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a pinch of STardust

HERE'S a thumbnail analysis of You, done without benefit of trance or crystal ball:

You are a smart and dogged person, possessed of considerable patience and either twenty-twenty vision or the next thing to it. What's more, you've got plenty of time on your hands.

True? False? Well, it has to be true, or anyway a little bit true, because the fact that you got your hands on the copy of the magazine you are now reading proves it. These days it takes real talent to find the

magazine you want; the handiest newsstand available for research has fourteen science-fiction magazines lined row on row; we've heard of stands with many, many more.

There's a moral here, and the moral is this. Now that you've got your copy of *Star Science Fiction* we hope you'll like it. And we hope that you'll come back for more; but what we hope most of all is that if *Star Science Fiction* turns out to be what you like, you'll remember the name. *Star*. Go ahead, say it:

S-T-A-R, *Star*. See, it's easy.

As a bonus for accomplishing this feat of memorization, which can be done at home in only a few moments of your spare time, we undertake to print up another issue ninety days or so from date, and to see that it gets put on sale in pretty nearly the same place in your neighborhood stationery store as you found this one.

The rest, of course, is up to you!!

* * *

How to Irritate Your Friends and Be a Crashing Bore at Parties:

Here's a brain-twister you can use to put a stop to any conversation whatever. It never fails. In the event that you would like to twist your own brain first, the solution is concealed along toward the end of these remarks.

The situation is this:

It is April 1st, 2759. Space travel has become feasible, and you are about to land on Ganymede, moon of Jupiter. The navigator of the ship is older than Robinson. Brown's father, who suffers from motion sickness and is therefore incapacitated at landings and takeoffs, is the steward. The youngest man on the ship is not the pilot,

but he remembers seeing Halley's Comet when he was a child. Smith's birthday is the same as the flight surgeon's, but there is a fifteen-year difference in their ages. Young Brown discovers that his age in days is equal to an exponential power of ten plus the number of years in Robinson's age. Give the exact age in years, months and days of any member of the ship's complement.

Got the problem? No fair peeking ahead. . . .

* * *

What kind of a guy is Isaac Asimov?

Well, he's this kind of guy: When he was courting the present Mrs. Asimov he didn't have any trouble remembering her phone number, he only dialed D-E-A-R-E-S-T and that was the lady. Luck? Well, in a way, yes—there were several million phones within dial range, after all, and only one of them was hers. Still, do you know what your phone number spells? Asimov did; and that's the kind of guy he is.

And he is this kind of guy: When he went into the Army, at the close of World War II, he had Army psychiatrists buzzing and clucking around him for weeks. It wasn't so

much that they thought a man who wrote science fiction had to be off his trolley somewhere; it was what he had done with the A.G.C.T. (the Army I.Q. test) that bothered them. On that test, anything over a hundred and thirty is splendid; and what troubled the skull doctors was trying to make up their minds what to do about this fellow Asimov, who had scored a neat 160, or three points less than perfect—and *that's* the kind of guy he is.

And he is this kind of guy: He wrote *S As in Zebatinsky*, in this issue. Read it; and then you'll know once and for all what kind of a guy is Isaac Asimov, Ph.D.

* * *

Remember radio?

Now that we've all got that old TV monkey riding on our backs, we tend to overlook the elder medium. But the plain fact of the matter is that, as far as science fiction is concerned at any rate, radio has it all over television. Oh, sure, there's science fiction on TV once in a while—lots of old movies (and a sillier mass of trash than them it is hard to find), and even a few regularly scheduled new shows, mostly aimed at kids. But even the

new ones are, at the very best, pretty tired and elementary jobs of writing and production.

Not radio. Apart from one-shots (and there have been some good ones), there's at least one weekly series worth half an hour of anybody's time. We mention it with some diffidence because it has used a couple of stories by the undersigned—but not enough to taint it; nor enough to alter the fact that it is based primarily on the stories published in one of our favorite competitors, *Galaxy Science Fiction*. The name of the program is *X Minus One*, and you can hear it (at the moment, anyway—but radio being what it is, regard nothing as final) on Thursday nights on the NBC radio network.

Try kicking the TV habit one Thursday and see if you don't like it. We're willing to bet you will. The stories are faithful and well handled adaptations of new shorts and novelettes by the likes of Clifford D. Simak, Isaac Asimov, Fritz Leiber, Robert Sheckley—well, you name your favorites; you'll find that practically all of them have been represented. And the actors involved are as good as they come; and if you happen to hear a girl whose name

turns out, in the credits at the end of the show, to be Rollie Bester—as you well may, because she's been on before—you might be interested to know that her husband's given name is Alfred, the same being the author of—among others—*The Demolished Man*.

* * *

Speaking of movies, a couple of years ago Ray Bradbury went to Ireland. One of the things that came out of that trip was a movie, and a pretty good one, too—named *Moby Dick*. But something else pretty good came from Bradbury's Irish Odyssey, for while he was there Ray happened upon a young Irishman who had written a story—not only that, but a science-fiction story—not only that, but a *good* one. But we don't have to tell you whether it's good or not, for you can judge for yourself. The writer: Gavin Hyde. The story: *Nor the Moon by Night*.

And it's in this very issue.

* * *

You didn't peek, did you?

Well, if you've really done your best on the puzzle a few paragraphs back and your

a pinch of STARDust

brain is now out of shape as a result, here is the solution. Question: Give the age of a member of the ship's complement. Answer: Well, how old *will* you be on April Fool's Day, 2759?

* * *

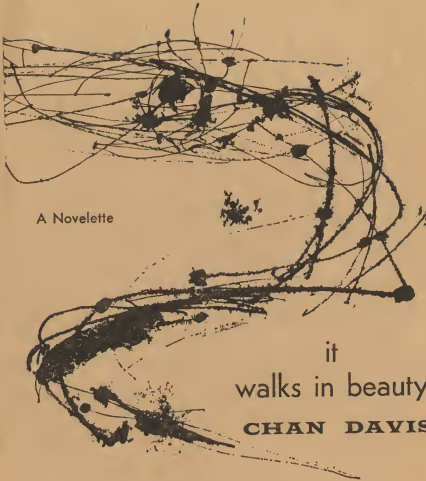
There is no truth to the rumor that C. M. Kornbluth is the wife of the undersigned.

The report started when a literary critic somehow got his wires crossed and, in reviewing a science-fiction novel written by Kornbluth and your editor in collaboration, referred to the team as husband-and-wife . . . and the resulting indignation of this member of the partnership was exceeded only by the fury of his very much male collaborator, C. (for Cyril) M. Kornbluth.

Wife or no, however, we're pleased to be able to tell you that we've got a fine Kornbluth story upcoming in our next issue—to be accompanied by exciting stories by Lester del Rey, Henry Kuttner, Algis Budrys and *lots* more. We think you'll like them. But in order to like them you'll have to read them; and that you will be around to do so is the fondest wish of—

FREDERIK POHL





A Novelette

it
walks in beauty

CHAN DAVIS

HARRIET waved to Max from the end of its row, but Max's thoughts were far away. He wandered back down the line, half his mind on his job, the other half on

the woman he loved.

Jim called to him, "Hey, Max! Wake up. Didn't you see Harriet?"

Max shook himself and glanced toward it, but it was

it walks in beauty

busy with its own jobs. He leaned against the ladder that ran up the towering vat of Number 73. "Jim," he confided dreamily, "I love Luana."

Jim came over. "I love Luana too," he said.

Max looked up, delighted. "You too?" Jim nodded. If Jim had disagreed with him, Max would have cheerfully defended Luana all day, but it was even more fun for his friend to understand already. "That Luana," said Max, shaking his head in wonder at the strength of his own devotion.

"She's some kid," Jim seconded, shaking his head the same way. "That kid was made for loving, and does she know it!"

"That's the most important thing about a woman," Max assured him seriously. "She should want to be loved. With all her being she should welcome all the passion a man has to give." Max had never understood this before, because Luana was his first real love.

"That's right," said Jim, "and Luana fills that bill with plenty to spare."

They both chuckled gloatingly. Max hooked an elbow over a ladder rung, Jim sat on the bench in front of the indicator strip, and they got

comfortable for a thorough listing of Luana's attractions. Luana's little scarlet mouth, Luana's mincing shoulders, Luana's little stretch and yawn, presenting her breasts—oh, yes, Luana's breasts, very important! They went through all these features, stopping to appreciate each one in detail, shaking their heads, grinning, and grunting: "Mm, mm."

They had got to Luana's snake-hips walk when the alarm had to go off on Number 71. Loud, unmusical, quickly-damped *bink bink bink*. Jim shrugged to his feet and walked down to 71, turning off the alarm. Max looked over his shoulder.

THERE were 144 tiny strands of synthetic protein fiber being extruded from jets at the bottom of each vat, solidifying as they hit the salt bath. While they shot fiber downward, the jets circled horizontally, twisting strands in sixes, then six sixes together, so that altogether from 144 strands came four ropes—threads, rather, of lanon, humming away down through the floor, driven by the friction of a series of delicate little rollers at the highest speed and tension they were likely to be able to take.

At Number 71 one of them had failed to take it. It had broken. A delicate little roller had sprung up a few millimeters with the release of tension, and before the upswing was completed electronic relays had triggered emergency measures: one circle of jets had stopped circling or extruding, so that now only 108 strands streamed from Number 71; wheels driving the snapped thread through tank after tank below them had adjusted their tension to guide the tag end through; the alarm bell had rung for Jim.

Jim checked the indicator strip. It showed nothing, so the trouble must be in the jets themselves. Jim drained off the bath around the stopped circle, and reached in with a pair of needle-nosed tongs and a brilliant flashlight pointing at a 45° mirror, to find which of the jets had failed.

Max left. He was embarrassed about showing unnecessary interest in the lanon spinners in front of Jim.

He strolled down to Number 78, the end of their row, checking indicator strips. At the end of the row he looked both ways. Again Harriet happened to be doing the same at the end of the row

next to his; they waved casually.

Max sat down in front of Number 73. He wanted Jim to finish with Number 71 so they could go on talking about Luana. It was the next best thing to seeing Luana herself. Jim was older than he was, two pay classifications higher, and a lot more experienced. Talking to Jim strengthened his confidence that Luana was the sexiest woman in the world, and that what he felt was genuine adult love.

WHEN 71 was going again, Max asked first, "What was wrong?"

Of course Jim didn't answer, just pretended to spit behind him. He sat in the same place he'd been in before and squinted at Max. "So, young Max has started seeing Luana's show, has he?"

Max was stung. "Started? I've been there every night for a long time."

"I haven't seen you there."

"Say, that's right—I haven't seen *you* there more than twice. How long have *you* been going?"

"Off and on for——"

"Off and on!" exclaimed Max. "I don't go *off* and *on*! I go every night. I don't see how you can stand to go to

any other dancer when you could be seeing Luana. For five weeks I've even been sitting up front. Man, I'm really hooked."

"I sat up front there for the first time last night," Jim admitted. "But I always enjoyed Luana. I've been seeing her off and on for longer than you've been at Lanon."

Max was not impressed. He kept his scorn to himself. Imagine seeing Luana for over a year before you fell in love with her! It had taken *him* only a few weeks before he was sure, and since then his loyalty had been absolute. He just said, "Anyway, you're going tonight, huh?"

"And how. Like to go down together? I'll meet you after dinner."

Max was flattered. "Sure enough." But he should tell Jim about his other plan. That wouldn't be easy. He might not even have made the other plan if he'd known Jim loved Luana. He hesitated.

Jim went on, "Am I going tonight, he asks. I'm just as hooked as you are, now. I'm not going to miss any chances to see that kid. Boy, would I like to——" He said what he'd like to do to Luana.

Max said that he would like to, too.

JIM began whistling. Max couldn't hear the tune above the hum of the spinners, neither could Jim; but it broke up the talk.

Max checked the indicator strips again. He stopped at Number 77.

The smooth column called simply "vat" concealed a continuous-flow protein-synthesis process, in complex convolutions of tubing. The contents were sampled and analyzed continuously and automatically; the results were transmitted to the indicator strips, but also called for their own corrections at the reagent input valves. So the readings weren't supposed to vary much. The indicator also showed the rate of input of reagents; *that* sometimes did vary a good deal. As now on Number 77.

It was the hydroxyl input at Level 8. Normally this was a small rate, sometimes zero; now a good deal of dilute base was pumping in up there. Max pulled the chain which slid the hanging ladder to him, and went up. At Level 7 he passed the transparent deck known as the Supers' Walk. He pressed the button to signal the lab, then climbed up to Level 8 and opened a port in the side of the vat, revealing a tangle of tubing...

No, there was nothing wrong mechanically with the input valve.

Paula appeared just below him. Paula wasn't a superintendent, just an analyst, but its lab was right next to the office, and analysts as well as supers had the run of the Supers' Walk.

"Hi," said Max. He was glad Paula had come out, instead of just talking into a mike, the usual way.

"Hi, Max, what's the trouble?"

"Hydroxyl input up to two point. Nothing else showing yet."

"Which analyzer is calling for more hydroxyl?"

"The pH at the same level. That's what I'm looking at now." He poked through a new port.

"Listen," Paula pointed to the tiny pipes running from Jim and Max's row to the lab. "Send us some of your input solution in line A, and some from the chamber in B." Paula smiled. "You're getting sharp, Max, to spot this thing so early."

"Oh, I'm doing okay." He smiled back. Jim would never have praised him, and Paula knew this stuff as well as Jim did.

He flipped the toggles that would send the samples Paula

wanted to the lab, then closed up the port. "Shall I stay up here?"

"Suit yourself." Another smile over Paula's departing shoulder. Max wasn't allowed above Level 6 unless something was wrong or he had explicit permission. Now he had permission.

He watched the little figure walking in a businesslike way back to the lab. Paula wore a man's short haircut and a man's pants, like any career girl. It was a little ridiculous, like a man yet not quite a man; Max had to admit it. But he didn't really feel it. Everybody respected Paula as a worker. In Max's case the word was *liked*. Paula had been his *friend*, almost from the first day he'd worked at Lanon, and he didn't care who knew it.

SINCE he had permission to stay up here, he looked around. He opened up the ports on Levels 7 and 8 and traced the connections without touching them. He could imagine the comment he'd get if Jim saw him: "Hey, youngster, don't you know your job yet? If you've still got valves to memorize I guess I didn't drive you hard enough in your apprenticeship." But Max was just interested. He

liked to go over things again. Paula understood.

He would have liked even better to follow Paula into the lab. He'd never been in there; to him it was only a wide, whitely lighted room whose door always closed before he saw more.

Partly to look busy in case Jim was watching him from below, he picked up tools and tested some of the analyzers at Level 8. He didn't find anything, of course.

Then he tested viscosity at a couple of points. He wouldn't find anything there either, of course. But he did! In the tank where the benzene solution of peptide derivatives sprayed in tiny bubbles into a water phase, the mixture acted wrong. Likely the bubbles were too big, giving too small a total benzene-water surface, and throwing everything off from Level 9 down. This must have been the trouble all along, though he couldn't have guessed it.

He signaled the lab again, shut off the inputs, and went to work on the spray nozzles. For this job he should have called Jim. But Paula came out again, and this time Max was complimented even more, and Max was glad he had tackled the job himself.

The heck with Jim! Max

felt good enough to go through with his plan for tonight, and never mind Jim. As he finished the job, he hung up his tools and said, "Say, Paula, would you like to go down to Luana's together? I'll meet you at your dormitory after dinner."

No answer. Paula's face was very serious and almost soft in an unfamiliar way.

To make it clear that this was an invitation to something that was very important to him, Max explained, "I love Luana."

Still no answer. Was seeing a dancer too unfamiliar a suggestion? Max couldn't remember seeing very many career girls in Luana's audience, as a matter of fact, and those hadn't come with men. He asked, "Have you ever been to a dancer's house before?"

"Oh, yes, I've seen dancers before." Now Paula smiled, and decided. "Max, it was nice of you to ask me. I'd like to go to Luana's with you. I'll meet you after dinner."

"Swell," said Max, and retreated down the ladder. But it hadn't been swell; it had been a disappointment, compared with the way any man would have reacted to the invitation, even if he'd turned it down.

Well, naturally, it wouldn't

be the same as a man. But why had Paula hesitated that way?

II

"HOW have things been going, Jim?"

"All quiet. You sure took a long time up there."

"Yeah, the stream into the tank on Level 9 wasn't getting broken up. That doesn't happen too often, huh?"

Jim grunted.

This was a good enough explanation for Max's having taken so long. Max could have added that the only reason he'd found what the trouble was so early was curiosity, but it didn't even occur to him to do it. Some difficulties you avoid automatically, by habit.

But Max plunged right into another difficulty. "Say, Jim, how about Paula coming with us tonight?"

He was expecting Jim to look surprised, but not to look the way he did! Max had already begun to wince when Jim started: "Why not invite Harriet too and make it a *family party*?"

Max didn't say anything. It was true Harriet was a friend of Paula's, but he understood Jim's sarcasm.

Jim showed no mercy.

it walks in beauty

"How about Paula coming with us, huh? What's it going to see in Luana?"

"Okay, Paula's not the same as you or me, obviously, okay; but it's a nice guy just the same."

"It's a nice guy at work," Jim said slowly and emphatically, "and at Luana's it is not a nice guy, it's a fifth wheel. Pants don't make a man."

Max shrugged his shoulders, even though he was suffering. He wasn't prepared to quarrel with Jim or anybody else on the subject. Without thinking about it he knew it was absolutely necessary to him that Paula's coming along should not be made a big issue.

And equally necessary to him that it should come.

What could he do? He thought of making a joke to calm Jim down, but that's all he thought, he didn't think of the joke.

He just said bluntly, "Calm down. It's not its fault it's not a man."

"No," Jim agreed in the same exaggerated tone, "that is true; I'm sorry for it, and all that; but at Luana's it's a fifth wheel."

Max shrugged his shoulders again and turned away. "I don't know," he said,

wishing he could be casual. "Paula's always been very decent to me, and I think it's a nice girl, that's all."

Something else for Jim to pounce on. "Nice *girl*? It's grown up now! It's not a little girl any more, it's a full-grown career."

Max knew the career girls themselves didn't like to be called simply "careers," but he accommodated. He went back to, "It's a nice guy."

With the heaviest sarcasm yet, Jim said, "A *personal friend* of yours, no doubt." That was his clincher.

Max stopped breathing. How could he handle *that* one casually? He couldn't. "All I said was, it's a nice guy." He didn't look at Jim. He meant it when he said, "Unfortunately I already asked it, and I can't just back out."

"Did you tell it I was coming?"

"No."

"Well, that's good at least. Listen, why don't you tell it you're sick?" Suddenly Jim was making helpful suggestions to a friend in a jam.

"I can't stay at the dormitory tonight, I have to see Luana."

"Come along and see Luana, Paula won't know."

"It might find out, it might even come and see me there."

"Not likely, and if it does, so what?"

But that was going too far for Max. "Paula's a nice guy," he repeated stubbornly.

With a sudden snort, Jim said, "Go with Paula, then, but not me." Subject closed.

MAX made another routine check of the row, then sat down a couple of spinners away from Jim. He was confused. If he'd known this was going to happen, he wouldn't have—what wouldn't he have done?

Why did Jim have to be so intolerant, anyway?

He wished he was talking to Jim about Luana again, but he knew he couldn't now.

Jim strolled over and said charitably, "You'll change your mind." Then he strolled away again. Obviously that was as far as *he* was going to go.

Max sat thinking unhappily. Maybe he *would* change his mind and tell Paula he was sick—maybe.

Remembering Paula's efficient walk and the brave self-respect with which it looked up at men, he felt a sudden strong stab of affection. He excused the emotion to himself. After all, it was a very nice guy.

Someone was on the Supers'

Walk in their row. An analyst? He looked up. No, it was gray-haired Superintendent Kees himself. Without seeming to hurry, Max got to his feet and started pacing the row, checking every spinner. Jim caught on too, and did the same.

Mr. Kees didn't pay any attention to them. He was looking over Number 77, where Max had just done the job on the nozzles. When Max met Jim at the middle of their row he crossed his fingers and Jim repeated the sign—both of them surreptitiously, as if Mr. Kees could see crossed fingers from almost thirty meters above them. As if Mr. Kees would be surprised if he did!

After five minutes or so the superintendent left, without having looked down.

Max breathed easier, and Jim grinned at his relief. "We're glad to see you go," Jim muttered toward the Supers' Walk, and added in falsetto, "old Husband Kees."

"Huh? Since when is Kees married?"

"A couple of weeks ago."

Max thought Jim might be inventing this for his sake, to build him up after being nervous about Mr. Kees. "Honest?" he said.

"Yep. Just got the word from Roland this morning."

"He's jaypeed, you mean."

"Nope." Jim made a mock-solemn long face. "This is no jaypee fling, this is a real old-fashioned *family* marriage."

"No kidding! I never would have thought it. With all the money he's got, he could keep playing the field till almost any age. Who did he marry?" Max expected to hear the name of some famous dancer. Now if it was a question of settling down with somebody like Luana, Max could see something in marriage, no matter what Jim might say.

"*Hah*. You know *who* he married?" Jim, in his glee, was having trouble keeping his voice low. "Remember Frederika?"

"Sure. It used to be one of the office secretaries, left about a year ago."

"Less than a year."

"Yeah. So who did Kees marry?"

"Frederika," Jim exulted, "changed its name, let its hair grow, took one or two dancing lessons, and opened a house."

"And Kees married *it*." Max was stunned.

"Her, now. Kees married her almost the minute it became legal. Bought out her contract and married her."

MAX wondered if maybe Roland had made the story up. Even if this thing had actually happened at Lannon, Max felt vaguely that it'd be better not to talk about it. But curiosity was overriding. "How old is it—how old is she, anyway? Must be thirty at least."

"Thirty-five, I bet."

"Imagine a woman not getting the urge until she was thirty-five," Max marveled.

Jim pretended to spit behind him. "Obviously if a girl hasn't felt the urge by thirty-five, it's going to be a career. It's not cut out for anything else, period."

"You mean Frederika never really had a woman's instincts at all?"

"Obviously. Frederika became a dancer just so she could get married! How much of an audience do you think she ever got at her house? Who beside Kees?" Jim's eyes were bright with suppressed laughter and his voice was a jeer. "I bet she couldn't even get a promoter. I bet behind the scenes Kees financed the whole thing himself. It must have cost plenty."

Max still felt the conversation was indecent, but—"Why did he do it? Why would he even go to see her?" It was hard to understand.

"He went to see her dance because he loved her."

This, at least, was a joke, Max knew. "Oh, go on. How could he love her when he could see real women, like Luana, or even Marta? It isn't *natural* to love anybody except the most beautiful woman you've seen, obviously."

"You don't have to tell me."

Jim whispered, winking, "confidentially, Kees wanted to get married from the beginning. He likes children!" And Jim's derision overflowed in violent laughter, loud and long. It was okay, if the super heard he wouldn't know what the joke was. Max joined in, laughing at old Husband Kees.

Jim was still his friend after all.

III

IT WASN'T only loyalty to Paula that made Max go through with taking it to Luana's, it was partly loyalty to the way he'd felt about the idea in the morning. He was too stubborn to give it up so far as to lie to Paula.

As he and Paula went down the plush winding stair into Luana's, Max heard the audio inside, beat, beat, beat, and a rolling melody. It was playing Luana's theme, though, so he knew the evening was just be-

ginning in there. The familiar excitement made him feel like running down those last few steps. As soon as they were at the bottom he turned toward Luana.

Luana was gorgeous to-night. (Luana was always gorgeous!) Her head was raised as she faced the audience, her heavily shadowed eyes were closed, her scarlet mouth pouted, glittering jewels swung on her waist-length braids. Luana was gorgeous.

Luana gave a little stretch and yawn, presenting her breasts. Max tingled all over. What a body!

It was easy to see why so few girls became dancers. How many of them had bodies like Luana's? How many of them had bodies even approaching Luana's?

Tonight Luana was wearing practically nothing above the waist, and you could appreciate her to the fullest. Below the waist, she was covered, the same as always, by a loose ankle-length skirt which swirled excitingly whenever she turned. (Max had been trying to decide the last few nights whether Luana was pregnant again yet. He hoped not, of course.)

Mabel came up to Max and Paula as they stood at the bottom of the stairs, to take their

admission fees. Max was returned abruptly to his problem. Would Mabel notice in the dimness the slight extra length of Paula's jacket that signified it was not a man? Would she let them in if she did know Paula's sex? To be sure, Paula had said it had seen dancers before, so maybe it was okay.

Max paid his own admission. Mabel said, "Good evening, Max," and turned to Paula. "Are you with him?"

"We're together," said Paula calmly.

Mabel took its money too. She said, "You'll have to sit in the back."

"Certainly," said Paula.

They took their seats—in the back.

This was terrible! Max had been up front for five weeks without missing a night, and he was sure Luana must have been stirred by his constancy. She must have begun to realize he was not just an adolescent fooling around. What would she think now when she didn't see him?

It was possible she might notice him even back here. But if she did, what would she think? That he had decided he didn't *want* to stay up front.

This was all a big mistake!

Here was Max in the back with the mere spectators, and

up there, separated from him by a wide aisle, sitting right at the edge of the lighted area where Luana danced, were a dozen other guys. Tonight, as far as Luana was concerned, they were the devoted lovers. Max was sick with envy.

He recognized most of them. There was Jim, with Roland, the other Luana follower from Lanon. Most outstanding, there was Dan Sellars. Two weeks ago Luana, late in the evening, while dancing around the stage with Dan Sellars, had led him off-stage to be jaypeed, ending the show for the night. Max's throat choked up just remembering it, thinking of the sudden rush of delicious passion that must have filled Luana's lovely body, imagining himself in Dan Sellars's place!

But it had not been Max, it had been Dan Sellars, and he and Luana had stayed that way for two whole weeks—not bad! And here was Max, in the back rows. Tonight would not be the night Luana would jaypee with him; or even have her first dance with him; or even lean invitingly over his chair in passing, as she had done twice this week.

BEAT, beat, beat, and the melody rolled languidly.

Max told himself that he

couldn't stay bitter while he was at Luana's.

Luana spread her slender arms wide, and clasped her hands behind her head. Leaning her head way back, she slunk back and forth in front of the audience, panting audibly. Back and forth, over and over.

Max knew this was irresistible. He knew the effect that would hit him now, and he waited for it impatiently, like a man who has just chug-a-lugged two double whiskeys.

It hit. It rocked him. He kept his eyes on Luana, feeding the flame. . . . He still loved that Luana, all right. Oh, it had hit!

But maybe not quite so strong as usual?

Of course he was farther away from her now. He wasn't up front.

The audio changed tunes, and Luana changed moods. She swung gaily up to Dan Sellars and danced him around and around the floor. He was certainly a good man for her when it came to dancing. Luana looked so graceful and loving when he held her. In some ways it was even better than watching Luana alone.

Without warning Luana danced him through the curtains out of the room. The audio was hushed. Nobody

moved from his seat, it was too early for Luana's evening shift to be over, but there was a little rustle of whispering, speculating. It died to total silence as the curtain stirred.

It was Dan Sellars, alone. Luana was unattached again! She had renoed him!

Dan Sellars walked deadpan to his seat; he was still going to sit up front at Luana's, then. Max approved.

The audio blared and Luana skipped through the curtains, her scarlet lips laughing unrestrainedly. She was wearing a new skirt, flaming red, and her shoulders were spread with tiny spangles.

Swinging the red skirt merrily, Luana began to sing. How many dancers could sing too?—let alone sing like Luana.

It was *The Call of My House*, a fairly new song. Max was disappointed. He loyally enjoyed it, but really he thought most of the new songs, even the serious ones like this, sounded inadequate for the emotions he felt for Luana. They sounded insincere. Now the old songs—the *really* old songs that were revived every so often—had the directness of true art. The words were usually inappropriate for a dancer to be singing to her audience, but he

could allow for that. The sentiments might be from another time, but they were sincere. Songs like *Rosalie*, *Kalamazoo*, or *I Wanna Love You*.

AFTER the song Luana began dancing with one after another of the men up front. Everybody was unusually excited tonight, because of Luana's having renoed—Luana herself most of all. It had a stimulating effect. She danced with Roland and even with Dan Sellars, more gracefully, more yieldingly than she had the last few nights. It was something to watch. But the more Max enjoyed it the more he longed to be up front.

Luana sang again. Just as if she had heard Max's wish, it was one of the old favorites. He even thought she seemed to be singing toward the one empty seat Mabel had left up front. And after the song was over she'd be dancing again! If it wasn't for Paula—

Paula. He'd actually forgotten it was because of Paula that he was back here.

Remembering startled him, he turned to face Paula. It met his eyes.

It said conversationally, "Max, you're pretty devoted

to Luana, aren't you?" How could it be so calm?

Well, naturally, it wouldn't be the same as a man.

He said intensely, "I'd do absolutely anything for her—anything at all."

Paula stared at him thoughtfully. He didn't have anything to say to it, or any real purpose in having turned in the first place. He was even a little embarrassed. And Luana's voice caressing him.

Paula said quietly, "I have to stay in the back section, but you can go up alone if you want to and sit in your usual chair."

"That's right!" he said. "Why didn't I think of that?"

IN THE front row you heard Luana's voice much more intimately.

Luana must have noticed him taking his seat in the middle of a number, but she would know it was just from impatience to be near her. What would she think of his being so late, though? Had he ruined his chances?

When she had finished the song Luana stood at one end of the row of seats. The audio was off, everything was quiet. She yawned and stretched tantalizingly. Then she walked slowly from one follower

to the next, the length of the row. She was deciding which one to dance with next; but she was considering her decision a lot more carefully than usual, it must be an important one.

Nobody moved. Max had to restrain himself consciously from squirming with suspense. Luana started back along the row, hesitating at each chair. She was in front of Max! She stayed there—longer than she ever had before!

And moved on.

And danced with Jim!

Jim, who had been up front only one night before! There was no justice in it. Max just couldn't understand women at all. Jim was a nice guy, but after all!

Then came the catastrophe. Luana and Jim danced two or three times around the floor—gracefully, Max had to admit, they danced well together—and through the curtains.

The evening was over, in an explosion of applause from the audience. Luana had jaypeed Jim. Jim!

Max got up blindly and left, ignoring Paula's hand in his, ignoring the cool night air, walking without a thought in his head that he could bear.

IV

HE NOTICED where he was when Paula took away its hand and sat down on the floor, smiling up at him.

Max was confused, as if he was waking up from a long sleep. He sat down beside Paula.

They were in a familiar enough place, the entry to the Spinning Department at Lannon. Max clocked in here every morning when he came to work. Every time he clocked in he looked at the time. Automatically he looked at the time now: 23:25.

"Why'd we come here?"

"I asked Antonina at dinner tonight if it wanted me to take its shift for it. I go on at midnight. I thought you wouldn't mind if we walked over here early."

"Do you buy other girls' shifts often?" he asked without much interest. "How much do you get for them?"

"I didn't buy the shift."

"Oh, you're just taking it as a favor."

"That's right. I knew I'd be up tonight anyway, and Antonina always has a hard time with the first shift."

They sat in silence. Paula's regular chewing became audible, and simultaneously Paula

said, "I've got chocolate mints. Want one?"

For the first time tonight Max realized that Paula was a remarkable girl. Mints, at this point—remarkable. He thanked it and chewed contentedly.

They were silent again. Max turned back to troubled thoughts of Luana. After a while he couldn't keep from saying it any longer: "I can't understand her."

Paula answered, "Stop thinking she's a mystery, Max, and you can understand her as well as you understand most people."

This time Max turned to it in astonishment. It still sat relaxed, leaning against the wall, one arm around a knee. It didn't even look at him.

Max was going to say, "What could you know about the subject?" but he toned it down to, "How do you know?" He waited, watching Paula.

It chewed away at the chocolate mint, but it seemed less relaxed. "True of everybody. People are funny, but they're all just people—if you see what I mean." It was definitely a little flustered now. "Anyhow, I know Luana."

"What?"

"Sure. Now, why should that surprise you? We went to school together. Of course

her name wasn't Luana then." Max did not ask to hear her former name. "She was my best friend—one of my best friends."

WHY was Max surprised? Mostly because it had never occurred to him that he would ever have a *friend* who was a *friend of Luana's*. Even in his daydreams he had never thought about being close to Luana in that way. It was hard to get used to. There was something else, though.

It was the ages. Luana seemed so magic and unattainable it was hard to think of her childhood's being with-in memory. But when he considered—Luana had been sixteen when she got her first contract, that he knew, and he knew she had had three pregnancies. She must be about twenty. That was just her chronological age, and it seemed like a terrible liar. Why, *he* was twenty, and it seemed as if Luana must have been Luana long before he was born . . . yet must have been under twenty-five the whole time.

"How old are you?"

"Just turned twenty-two."

"You were older than Luana!"

"A little."

"Gee, I wonder what Luana

was like as a girl?" He didn't really want to know, it was just an idea that was new and curious. He always mentioned new and curious ideas to Paula.

"What was she like? Well —" Paula thought. "You couldn't have told her from anybody else. She went to the same classes and played the same games. Slept in the same dormitory." Paula laughed tolerantly, and Max remembered how adolescent his question must have sounded: curiosity about life at a girls' school!

Still it was fascinating, and he was talking to Paula so it was okay. "You knew her. All through school?"

"From the time she entered till the time she left. I knew Marta too, her name used to be Henrietta. And a couple of dozen other dancers. You see, I just can't think of them as particularly mysterious—any more than I could think of you as mysterious when I work with you every day. But then—" Paula blurted out, "You're a man, after all. Sometimes I think career girls are the only ones who can understand people!"

"What do you mean?"

"For instance—who else reads? Can you imagine anybody reading because it want-

ed to, except a career girl? Well, that's not fair, *you* read. You're unusual. You haven't had much time for it recently, though, have you?"

"No." For a man there were more important things. To most people Max wouldn't admit that he had read at all since leaving school.

"But the main thing is, you cut yourself off from too many people. Career girls are the only ones who don't lie to themselves, so they're the only ones who can understand people."

Max didn't follow this at all.

Paula mused, "Here I go, though, lying to *myself*. We're cut off from people too. . . . We don't get to take care of children, the way the women do."

It sounded actually unhappy! This stopped Max with surprise for a moment; but he went ahead and retorted, "Well, if you understand people so much better than I do, tell me: How does Luana choose who to dance with? Or . . . who to jaypee?" Explain *that* if you can. He felt downright resentful. Of Paula or Luana?

PAULA stood up and paced back and forth a couple of times; its face was worried.

it walks in beauty

It spread its hands. "I think I understand, Max, but it's not simple."

"Well, just tell me this: What possible reason could she have for jaypeeing a guy who's been a follower only one night? If she wanted to choose him, at least she could have waited till he'd been up front a decent period—a couple of weeks anyway."

"Oh, Jim was a newcomer, was he?" She smiled faintly. "And you've been pretty devoted to Luana, haven't you?"

"You asked me that before. Answer my question."

"All dancers choose newcomers sometimes, Max. If they didn't, there'd be no excitement for men who had just started sitting up front. They'd know they wouldn't be noticed till they'd waited out a couple of weeks—at least with a popular dancer like Luana. They might even stop coming before the couple of weeks were up. A dancer has to keep attendance up, or the promoter will complain."

"But—tell me how could Luana——"

"How could she be so calculating? She should choose by the passion of the moment, is that it? I thought you wanted to understand why she chooses who she does; now you want a reason you *can't*

understand." Paula sat down again and added less combatively, "I don't know. Probably whim comes in too. I wouldn't be surprised." It gave itself another mint.

Max was still arguing. "Have you ever seen Luana since she became a dancer?"

"Yes, once."

"When?"

"Three years ago."

"So she'd only started then. You're not such a friend of hers. If you went down there to talk over old times I bet she'd have Mabel throw you out."

"Hm. As a matter of fact, she might. Luana didn't follow my advice. Maybe she feels bad about it, one way or the other."

Luana, follow Paula's advice? Naturally not. Max didn't even interrupt his argument. "So you've hardly seen her since she was a girl, and you couldn't even talk to her now—how do you know so much about how she thinks? After all, Paula, there's a whole area of experience that you don't have anything to do with, that's very important to Luana." Not to mention Max.

"That's true," said Paula in a very small voice.

"All right, then how can you say——" He looked at

Paula's soft face and stopped.

"In a way, what you say is very true. A whole area of experience that's very important—that's true, Max."

He looked at Paula and couldn't speak.

Paula said, "Have another mint, Max," and sat chewing quietly.

Max sat looking at the quiet, efficient, self-respecting, unhappy face, with growing sympathy. Poor girl! He hadn't been fair to Paula. When he'd learned that Luana had once been just another girl like Paula, and Paula's friend, he'd learned only half. Paula had once been like Luana, too, and Luana's friend.

That was a hard thought, too.

Paula must have dreamed of womanhood then, the same as Luana. But some girls—most girls—didn't have what it took.

IT WAS really terrifying. What must it be like to be a schoolgirl? Always wishing your complexion would clear up, wishing your breasts would grow rounder, waiting to feel that uncontrollable desire that would tell you you were a woman. He hadn't thought about such things since he was in school, and of course he hadn't been old

enough then to understand.

What must it be like to be a grown career girl!

"I guess career girls must feel sort of—" he hesitated a little—"envious of dancers."

"That is the usual attitude, I believe," Paula stated tonelessly.

There was a lot he hadn't understood, all right, Max conceded. How could he have considered himself Paula's friend before? Now he felt so much closer to it.

"It"—even the pronoun was a continual reminder of Paula's failure. In every sentence he spoke about the career girls he was pointing out that they were the ones who didn't make it. He could imagine how Paula must feel about that. Used to it, maybe, but surely not happy about it.

Max made a resolution. Maybe he was a little peculiar, but he didn't think so. After all, the elderly women who had been his school teachers had always been "her." Paula was his friend. Max resolved always to refer to any career girl as "her," from now on.

At least when he was alone with Paula.

He resolved even to *think* of Paula as "her." It wouldn't come naturally to use that pronoun for a modified man's

name like "Paula," when he was used to using "her" only for real women's names like "Luana" or "Clarissa." He'd do it, just the same. The way he'd been talking up to now sounded cruel.

He smiled happily and started to tell Paula his resolution. The words wouldn't come. He didn't know how to say it without sounding ridiculous.

Why? Because his resolution was a bad idea? No, not a bad idea; just pitifully inadequate. How much difference would a pronoun make to—her? If he talked as if it was saving her life, he'd sound very very silly, and just as cruel as if he'd done nothing.

If only there was some way to tell Paula that (at last) he sympathized.

Paula glanced at the clock. 23:49. The first shift would start showing up about now.

Paula stood up without looking at him. It—she—yawned and stretched. Max felt let down: apparently she didn't have anything more to say to him and was going to leave him ten minutes early, and he hadn't communicated to her yet.

Instead, she said, "Tired?"
"No."

"Why don't you come on with me? The super won't be around this shift, or any of the office staff. Don't even bother clocking in."

V

PAULA went straight to the lab but Max loafed on the Supers' Walk.

It was the Spinning Department in a different hour from the Spinning Department he saw daily, yet it might as well have been in a different year, or country. The rows of vats were the same, exactly the same, but strolling around the Supers' Walk gave a new and godlike perspective; they had changed. The row where he worked in the midday shift was superficially the same; he could recognize it without looking at the numbers, by the drooling discoloration on Number 74, the same as in the day; but instead of looking *up* at Mr. Kees he was looking *down* at somebody or other. To find out whether it was Max or not he'd have to check the personnel records. Who was he? *He* had changed.

He had an anything-could-happen feeling that he hadn't had since he was a kid, except maybe at Luana's.

Luana—she seemed distant

now. Time heals sorrows, and to Max there was a lot of time between an hour ago and now. He was still a Luana follower, certainly; his memory did not show the conspicuous event which stopping loving Luana would have made. He didn't worry quite as much about love, though. Love and curiosity didn't mix. Tonight Max was curious.

Which adventure should he choose?

This afternoon if he'd had an invitation to drop into the lab any time, with nobody to object, he'd have run all the way. Tonight it was hard to choose. Paula had changed everything: Luana, the Spinning Department, Paula herself. Max was itching to understand them all.

He chose the lab, though, partly because Paula would be there. For any adventure Paula should be there. Paula and curiosity went together.

MAX pushed open the door to the wide, whitely lighted room.

It wasn't quite as wide as he'd thought, and part of it wasn't lighted. That was the row of four desks along the left that were more likely computers. Accounting didn't work the night shifts. The rest of the room was a daz-

zling array of valves and tubes. Max threw his mind open to see what they could tell him. He let his eye wander over the maze, guided by hunches drawn from his apprenticeship outside there. Apprenticeship—that's what *this* was. Everything was new tonight. Tonight should have come after his first day at work, or his first week perhaps. But if it had he wouldn't have had a friend, Paula, who could show him around the lab.

He didn't see Paula. There was only one person in the lab, working in the far right corner, ignoring him. He recognized the person. "Harriet!"

"Hi, Max."

"I didn't know you knew this job."

"I've qualified for assistant, not for analyst."

"You taking somebody else's shift, just for tonight?"

"That's right. How about you?"

"Paula just asked me if I wanted to stick around. Where is Paula, anyway?"

"Out on one of the vats, Number 58 I think."

"She'll be right back, won't she? I was hoping——"

Uh-oh. *She*.

Harriet smiled at his faux pas; but not too jeeringly, if

it walks in beauty

at all. Max felt his face getting entirely red—all over—maximum. He hadn't blushed since he was in school.

Harriet said, "Paula should be back pretty soon. Would you like to sit down in the office? I'm pretty busy here."

"The office!"

"The Superintendent's Office, in there." The door on the dark side of the room. "The guys always use it on this shift. There usually isn't anybody around to check, and I'll be able to tip you off in time if there is."

Max pushed open the door and went through.

He wouldn't have been surprised to see a tropic garden.

IT WAS dark. He ricocheted off a hard desk into a soft chair. Keeping one hand on the chair for a base, he groped across the desk till he found a switch.

The switch only turned on a desk lamp. The little light fell concentrated on the desk top and scattered vaguely about the room. Desks, chairs, and cabinets were irresponsibly acute-angled. Max could have turned on more lights and reduced them to normality, but he preferred not to. He relaxed, getting used to novelty.

In the direction he was

facing, he couldn't see to the end of the office. Maybe the office extended farther than he'd assumed. He sat staring into the darkness there.

For a while he saw only darkness. Then a new, dim light went on and something moved. Max sat staring.

If what he saw might just as well have been a dream, why should he complain?

He thought he saw Luana.

Luana couldn't be in this office, but then neither could Max, and nevertheless here was Max, all alone, and, all for Max, here was Luana! Dancing! Why should he ask questions?

Luana danced for him.

Her hands clasped behind her head, that snake-hips walk. The same as this evening.

But the evening had ended wrong, so Max didn't let himself compare now to the evening. Everything was new this midnight. No music, she didn't need any! No crowded house, all the better!

He tried the experiment of watching the dance as if he had never seen it before. That wriggling walk was new. He could feel the burning passion that drove those hips. Then she stopped—stretched, lithely turning her body to right

and left—and yawned. What a body!

Max almost groaned aloud. Why didn't she come closer? How was he supposed to stand it this long? Still he was the audience, he didn't get out of his chair.

Gradually she came closer, and each step she took toward him was an act of surrender. Max couldn't stand it. He jumped from his chair. This was the love of his life!

She began to sing, a husky wordless croon that made him shiver and want to cry. This was the love of his life! And all for him!

But it wasn't Luana. He had never heard the voice before. He had to admit to himself now that it wasn't Luana.

He didn't care! Everything was new tonight. He could see and hear, couldn't he? Couldn't he tell that this was love? How could he think of Luana after this? This was true love! That husky voice said, "Dance with me," and the unbearably beautiful face turned up toward him.

The light rested on her soft cheek and Max adored her. He put his arm around her and his hand touched her back. "Oh, my darling!"

The beautiful face frowned,

and said, "Now do you see, Max?"

The voice was Paula's voice.

MAX didn't move. Warmth still throbbed through him like echoes after thunder. . . .

What had happened?

Eventually he had to know. It had not been a dream. His hand was still touching her back—Paula's back. He removed it; then he stood absolutely still again, trying to think.

The face was still close to his, Paula's pitiful, pleading face. He had to remember that even with the mouth painted over scarlet, even wearing the grotesque jeweled wig, even obscenely dressed in woman's clothes, this was his friend, Paula.

He whispered, "*Don't worry, Paula, I won't tell anybody.*"

She gasped.

Her frown dissolved.

Her face went soft again; for a moment he thought she had fainted. But she had sprung back away from him three or four steps, as graceful as a dancer. She said, in the husky, unreal voice:

"You can see and hear, can't you? *Can't you tell I'm a woman?*"

Max could hardly control

his embarrassment for her. Sure he could see and hear. She was dancing again, and crooning; and it was embarrassing. He could see and hear his friend Paula bouncing around—in a preposterous costume—with a faked voice. It embarrassed him!

"Max, please." The faked voice was begging now.

Max didn't know which way to look. He was enormously sorry for his friend Paula, but what could he do? Women were women and careers were—well, careers. It was a sticky, crawly feeling; it was almost as though Jim or one of the other men had made some revolting suggestion. It was not possible for Max to think in those terms; it wasn't part of his nature.

But Paula was his friend.

Max swallowed.

He tried hard. Pretend, he thought. Pretend you don't know it's Paula. He conjured up another emotional kick for the sake of the kick. Don't look underneath, he thought, just look at the body and listen to the voice. Woman? Think of it as woman.

The body was gorgeous. The voice made him shiver. The face was unbearably beautiful. He felt passion rising in him, he felt the drive for possession, he felt—

He felt corrupt and befouled. Instantly the passion was wrung off in a surge of icy fear and guilt. Too late, too late! He was betraying the love of his life, he was lowering himself! What would Luana think?

"Stop it!" he shouted. "Paula, for God's sake!"

SHE stopped. Her white shoulders drooped, her husky voice broke. Paula fell across the desk, crying. *Crying.*

Max couldn't help her and couldn't ignore her. He listened inertly, feeling shocked and disappointed in her.

She wept: "Oh, Max, I don't get it. I just don't get it!"

"Paula," he said, trying to be reasonable, "it's perfectly all right. It's just that I don't, well, enjoy that sort of thing."

She blazed: "What sort of thing is that?"

He cleared his throat. "You know. I mean, those clothes and all. That's not hair, it's just a wig. It isn't *real*. And I can't——" He hesitated, grasping for a way to express himself; and ended miserably: "Paula, you should get help."

"Max!" He shrugged and turned away, offended. She said, "Max, I'm not blaming

you. I'm as messed up as you are."

"Messed up! Me?"

She said, despairing, "Oh, what was I trying to do anyway? The whole thing's hopeless. But I don't get it. The wig?" She wrenched it off her head and dropped it on the floor; beneath it Paula's short, neat hair was still there. "If I were a dancer I'd wear a wig, you know. Luana wears one!"

"But Luana is—Luana," Max protested.

"I could go out and open a house tomorrow! You wouldn't see anything wrong with me then!"

"You?" Max shook his head, awakened from paralysis. How well had he ever understood Paula? Once more it was as though she had removed a disguise.

"Me!" She took a deep breath, then spoke wearily. "I tried out once. At Clarissa's house—the same time Luana did."

"You? But—oh, I see." Max nodded.

"No, you don't see! I went over—very well, in fact! Better than Luana did."

"Now, Paula——"

"It's true, Max. I could find a promoter tomorrow and open a house." She sat up on the desk, looking at him.

"You know, my fifth night at Clarissa's, I got unusually strong audience reaction—from practically everybody, even Clarissa's front row. My fifth night!" Well, that was astonishing, Max admitted to himself. But she wasn't talking about it with pride. She said: "You know what happened when I came offstage? Clarissa went on. And she said: 'We'll have to put that juicy morsel in a package all her own.' You understand? She meant I should have my own house. And the applause was tremendous."

She was too weary, too discouraged to lie; but it was beginning to strain Max's belief. "Why didn't you do it?" he asked doubtfully.

"I peeked through the curtain! I knew that if I did it I'd have to sign a five-year contract—I didn't have any money of my own. So I peeked at all those popeyed, yelling faces, and I thought, '*Five years.*'"

What any unwomanly reaction! Max couldn't help it, he edged away from her a little. "What's wrong with five years of life like Luana's?"

She said hopelessly, "If you can't understand it, I can't explain. Everything those men wanted from me they could have got from a hypo-

dermic needle. Juicy morsel! I couldn't stand five years of that kind of—of contempt!"

"Now, Paula!" Max was shocked. Contempt! To call love and—*and desire*, and— To call those things contempt! But she was saying:

"I tried to talk Luana out of it too. She may regret that she didn't listen to me."

WELL, that did it. Max stood up, able to smile. She'd had him going for a while, but—well, imagine Luana *regretting* her life and all her loves! The thing was preposterous.

"Max?" Paula was questioning.

"I have to go," he said.

"Oh, no, Max. Look—I'm sorry."

He punched her shoulder lightly. "Nothing to worry about," he said. "I'll see you tomorrow."

She stood up. "No, please, Max! I'll get my obscene men's clothes on, and we'll have a cup of coffee. What about it? Then you can stick around the lab afterward and watch us work. How about that? And——"

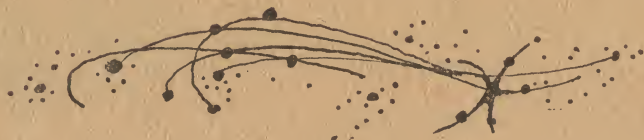
"Thanks, friend," he said, grinning. "I'll take you up on that sometime. But I've really got to get along." And he really had to, it was true; be-

cause it had just occurred to him that the evening didn't have to be entirely a loss. There was a place near Luana's house where you could wait. And sometimes, maybe, there would be a light in her window—perhaps even a shadow on the shade! Perhaps——

Well, it didn't matter; all

that mattered, of course, was being near to the one you love. "So long, Paula," he said. "And look, don't worry."

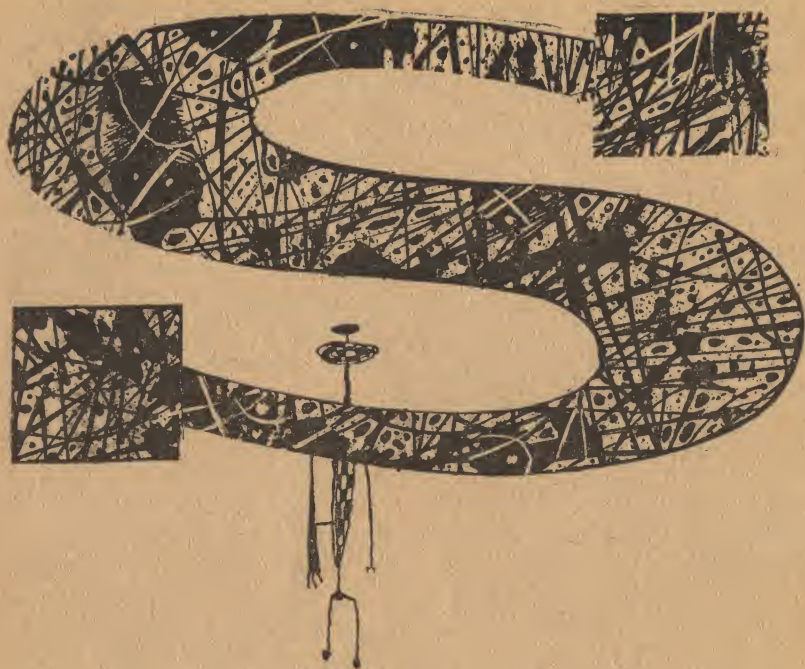
She said, in a voice barely loud enough to hear, "I won't." But it didn't matter, because Max wasn't listening. He was already gone. He was on his way to Luana!



forecast

As we go to press, the line-up for the next issue of *Star Science Fiction* isn't yet definite... but a good guess at the contents will include a novella, two novelettes and a cluster of short stories by Henry Kuttner, C. M. Kornbluth, Lester del Rey, Miriam Allen de Ford and others (how many others depends on how much the type can be made to stretch).

That's the APRIL issue—*STAR SCIENCE FICTION*—on sale January 12th or thereabouts. Watch for it!



as in zebatinsky

ISAAC ASIMOV

MARSHALL Zebatinsky felt foolish. He felt as though there were eyes staring through the grimy storefront glass and across the scarred wooden partition; eyes watching him. He felt no confidence in the old clothes he had resurrected or the turned-down brim of a hat he

never otherwise wore or the glasses he had left in their case.

He felt foolish and it made the lines in his forehead deeper and his young-old face a little paler.

He would never be able to explain to anyone why a nuclear physicist such as him-

self should visit a numerologist. (Never, he thought. Never.) Hell, he could not explain it to himself except that he had let his wife talk him into it.

The numerologist sat behind an old desk that must have been second-hand when bought. No desk could get that old with only one owner. The same might almost be said of his clothes. He was little and dark and peered at Zebatinsky with little dark eyes that were brightly alive.

He said, "I have never had a physicist for a client before, Dr. Zebatinsky."

Zebatinsky flushed at once. "You understand this is confidential."

The numerologist smiled so that wrinkles creased about the corners of his mouth and the skin around his chin stretched. "All my dealings are confidential."

Zebatinsky said, "I think I ought to tell you one thing. I don't believe in numerology and I don't expect to begin believing in it. If that makes a difference, say so now."

"But why are you here, then?"

"My wife thinks you may have something, whatever it is. I promised her and I am here." He shrugged and the

feeling of folly grew more acute.

"And what is it you are looking for? Money? Security? Long life? What?"

Zebatinsky sat for a long moment while the numerologist watched him quietly and made no move to hurry his client.

Zebatinsky thought: What do I say anyway? That I'm thirty-four and without a future?

He said, "I want success. I want recognition."

"A better job?"

"A *different* job. A *different kind* of job. Right now, I'm part of a team, working under orders. Teams! That's all government research is. You're a violinist lost in a symphony orchestra."

"And you want to solo."

"I want to get out of a team and into—into *me*." Zebatinsky felt carried away, almost light-headed, just putting this into words to someone other than his wife. He said, "Twenty-five years ago, with my kind of training and my kind of ability, I would have gotten to work on the first nuclear power plants. Today I'd be running one of them or I'd be head of a pure research group at a university. But with my start these days where will I be twenty-five

years from now? Nowhere. Still on the team. Still carrying my two per cent of the ball. I'm drowning in an anonymous crowd of nuclear physicists and what I want is room on dry land. If you see what I mean."

The numerologist nodded slowly. "You realize, Dr. Zebatinsky, that I don't guarantee success."

Zebatinsky, for all his lack of faith, felt a sharp bite of disappointment. "You don't? Then what the devil *do* you guarantee?"

"An improvement in the probabilities. My work is statistical in nature. Since you deal with atoms, I think you understand the laws of statistics."

"Do you?" asked the physicist, sourly.

"I do, as a matter of fact. I am a mathematician and I work mathematically. I don't tell you this in order to raise my fee. That is standard. Fifty dollars. But since you are a scientist, you can appreciate the nature of my work better than my other clients. It is even a pleasure to be able to explain to you."

Zebatinsky said, "I'd rather you wouldn't, if you don't mind. It's no use telling me about the numerical values of letters, their mystic

significance and that kind of think. I don't consider that mathematics. Let's get to the point——"

THE numerologist said, "Then you want me to help you provided I don't embarrass you by telling you the silly non-scientific basis of the way in which I helped you. Is that it?"

"All right. That's it."

"But you still work on the assumption that I am a numerologist, and I am not. I call myself that so that the police won't bother me and——" the little man chuckled dryly—"so that the psychiatrists won't either. I am a mathematician; an honest one."

Zebatinsky smiled.

The numerologist said, "I build computers. I study probable futures."

"What?"

"Does that sound worse than numerology to you. Why? Given enough data and a computer capable of sufficient number of operations in unit time, the future is predictable, at least in terms of probabilities. When you compute the motions of a missile in order to aim an anti-missile, isn't it the future you're predicting? The missile and anti-missile would not collide if the future were predicted

incorrectly. I do the same thing. Since I work with a greater number of variables, my results are less accurate."

"You mean you'll predict my future?"

"Very approximately. Once I have done that, I will modify the data by changing your name and no other fact about you. I throw that modified datum into the operation-program. Then I try other modified names. I study each modified future and find one that contains a greater degree of recognition for you than the future that now lies ahead of me. Or no, let me put it another way. I will find you a future in which the probability of adequate recognition is higher than the probability of that in your present future."

"Why change my name?"

"That is the only change I ever make, for several reasons. Number one, it is a simple change. After all, if I make a great change or many changes, so many new variables enter that I can no longer interpret the result. My machine is still crude. Number two, it is a reasonable change. I can't change your height, can I? Or the color of your eyes, or even your temperament. Number three, it is a significant change. Names

mean a lot to people. Finally, number four, it is a common change that is done every day by various people."

Zebatinsky said, "What if you don't find a better future?"

"That is the risk you will have to take. You will be no worse off than now, my friend."

Zebatinsky stared at the little man uneasily. "I don't believe any of this. I'd sooner believe numerology."

The numerologist sighed. "I thought a person like yourself would feel more comfortable with the truth. I *want* to help you and there is much yet for you to do. If you believed me a numerologist, you would not follow through. I thought if I told you the truth you would let me help you."

Zebatinsky said, "If you can see the future——"

"Why am I not the richest man on earth? Is that it? But I *am* rich—in all I want. You want recognition and I want to be left alone. I do my work. No one bothers me. That makes me a billionaire. I need a little real money and this I get from people such as yourself. Helping people is nice and perhaps a psychiatrist would say it gives me a feeling of power and feeds my

ego. Now, do you want me to help you?"

"How much did you say?"

"Fifty dollars. I will need a great deal of biographical information from you but I have prepared a form to guide you. It's a little long, I'm afraid. Still, if you can get it in the mail by the end of the week, I will have an answer for you by the—" he put out his lower lip and frowned in mental calculation—"the twentieth of next month."

"Five weeks? So long?"

"I have other work, my friend, and other clients. If I were a fake, I could do it much more quickly. Is it agreed then?"

Zebatinsky rose. "Well, agreed. This is all confidential, now."

"Perfectly. You will have all your information back when I tell you what change to make and you have my word that I will never make any further use of any of it."

The nuclear physicist stopped at the door. "Aren't you afraid I might tell someone you're not a numerologist?"

The numerologist shook his head. "Who would believe you, my friend? Even supposing you were willing to admit to anyone that you've been here."

ON THE 20th, Marshall Zebatinsky was at the paint-peeling door, glancing sideways at the shop-front with the little card up against the glass reading "Numerology," dimmed and scarcely legible through the dust. He peered in, almost hoping that someone else would be there already so that he might have an excuse to tear up the wavering intention in his mind and go home.

He had tried wiping the thing out of his mind several times. He could never stick at filling out the necessary data for long. It was embarrassing to work at it. He felt incredibly silly filling out the names of his friends, the cost of his house, whether his wife had had any miscarriages, if so, when. He abandoned it.

But he couldn't stick at stopping altogether either. He returned to it each evening.

It was the thought of the computer that did it, perhaps; the thought of the infernal gall of the little man pretending he had a computer. The temptation to call the bluff, see what would happen, proved irresistible after all.

He finally sent off the completed data by ordinary mail, putting on 9¢ worth of stamps without weighing the letter.

If it comes back, he thought, I'll call it off.

It didn't come back.

He looked into the shop now and it was empty. Zebatinsky had no choice but to enter. A bell tinkled.

The elderly numerologist emerged from a curtained door. "Yes? Ah, Dr. Zebatinsky."

"You remember me?" Zebatinsky tried to smile.

"Oh, yes."

"What's the verdict?"

The numerologist moved one gnarled hand over the other. "Before that, sir, there's a little——"

"A little matter of the fee?"

"I have already done the work, sir. I have earned the money."

Zebatinsky raised no objection. He was prepared to pay. If he had come this far, it would be silly to turn back just because of the money.

He counted out five ten-dollar bills and shoved them across the counter. "Well?"

The numerologist counted the bills again slowly, then pushed them into a cash drawer in his desk.

He said, "Your case was very interesting. I would advise you to change your name to Sebatinsky."

"Seba—— How do you spell that?"

"With an S."

Zebatinsky stared indignantly. "You mean change the initial? Change the Z to an S? That's all?"

"It's enough. As long as the change is adequate, a small change is safer than a big one."

"But how could the change affect anything?"

"How could any name?" asked the numerologist, softly. "I can't say. It may, somehow, and that's all I can say. Remember, I don't guarantee results. Of course, if you do not wish to make the change, leave things as they are. But in that case, I cannot refund the fee."

Zebatinsky said, "What do I do? Just tell everyone to spell my name with an S?"

"If you want my advice, consult a lawyer. Change your name legally. He can advise you on little things."

"How long will it all take? I mean for things to improve for me?"

"How can I tell? Maybe never. Maybe tomorrow."

"But you saw the future. You *claim* you see it."

"Not like in a crystal ball. No, no, Dr. Zebatinsky. All I get out of my computer is a set of coded figures. My ma-

chine takes data and performs operations and gives figures. I can recite probabilities to you, but I saw no pictures."

Zebatinsky turned and walked rapidly out of the place. Fifty dollars to change a letter! Fifty dollars for Sebatinski! Lord, what a name! Worse than Zebatinsky. . . .

It took another month before he could make up his mind to see a lawyer, and then he finally went.

He told himself he could always change the name back.

Give it a chance, he told himself.

Hell, there was no law against it.

HENRY BRAND looked through the folder page by page, with the practiced eye of one who had been in Security for fourteen years. He didn't have to read every word. Anything peculiar would have leaped off the paper and punched him in the eye.

He said, "The man looks clean to me." Henry Brand looked clean, too, with a soft, oval abdomen and a pink and freshly scrubbed complexion. It was as though continuous contact with all sorts of human failings, from possible ignorance to possible treason,

had compelled him into frequent washings.

Lieutenant Albert Quincy, who had brought him the folder, was young and filled with the responsibility of being security officer at the Hanford station. "But why Sebatinsky?" he demanded.

"Why not?"

"Because it doesn't make sense. Zebatinsky is a foreign name and I'd change it myself if I had it, but I'd change it to something Anglo-Saxon. If Zebatinsky had done that, it would make sense and I wouldn't give it a second thought. But why change a Z to an S? I think we *must* find out what his reasons were."

"Has anyone asked him directly?"

"Certainly. In ordinary conversation, of course. I was careful to arrange that. He won't say anything more than that he's tired of being last in the alphabet."

"That could be, couldn't it, Lieutenant?"

"It could but why not change his name to Sands or Smith, if he wants an S. Or if he's that tired of Z, why not go the whole way and change it to an A? Why not a name like—uh—Aarons?"

"Not Anglo-Saxon enough," muttered Brand. Then, "But there's nothing to pin against

the man. No matter how queer a name-change may be, that alone can't be used against anyone."

Lieutenant Quincy looked markedly unhappy.

Brand said, "Tell me, Lieutenant, there must be something specific that bothers you. Something in your mind; some theory; some gimmick. What is it?"

The lieutenant frowned. His light eyebrows drew together and his lips tightened. "Well, damn it, sir, the man's a Russian."

Brand said, "He's not that. No, he's a third-generation American."

"I mean his name's Russian."

Brand's face lost some of its deceptive softness. "No, Lieutenant, wrong again. Polish."

The lieutenant pushed his hands out impatiently, palms up. "Same thing."

Brand, whose mother's maiden name had been Wiszewski, snapped, "Don't tell that to a Pole, Lieutenant." Then, more thoughtfully, "Or to a Russian either, I suppose."

"What I'm trying to say, sir," said the lieutenant, reddening, "is that the Poles and Russians are both on the other side of the Curtain."

"We all know that."

"And Zebatinsky or Sebatinsky, whatever you want to call him, may have relatives there."

"He's third generation. He might have second cousins there, I suppose. So what?"

"Nothing in itself. Lots of people may have distant relatives there. But Zebatinsky changed his name."

"Go on."

"Maybe he's trying to distract attention. Maybe a second cousin over there is getting too famous and our Zebatinsky is afraid that the relationship may spoil his own chances of advancement."

"Changing his name won't do any good. He'd still be a second cousin."

"Sure, but he wouldn't feel as though he were shoving the relationship in our face."

"Have *you* ever heard of any Zebatinski on the other side?"

"No, sir."

"Then he can't be too famous. How would our Zebatinski know about him?"

"He might keep in touch with his own relatives. That would be suspicious under the circumstances, he being a nuclear physicist."

Methodically, Brand went through the folder again, "This is awfully thin, Lieu-

tenant. It's thin enough to be completely invisible."

"Can you offer any other explanation, sir, of why he ought to change his name in just this way?"

"No, I can't. I admit that."

"Then I think, sir, we ought to investigate. We ought to look for any men named Zebatinsky on the other side and see if we can draw a connection." The lieutenant's voice rose a trifle as a new thought occurred to him. "He might be changing his name to withdraw attention from *them*; I mean to protect *them*."

"He's doing just the opposite, I think."

"He doesn't realize that, maybe, but protecting them could be his motive."

Brand sighed. "All right, we'll tackle the Zebatinsky angle. But if nothing turns up, Lieutenant, we drop the matter."

WHEN the information finally reached Brand, he had all but forgotten the lieutenant and his theories. His first thought on receiving data that included a list of 17 biographies of 17 Russian and Polish citizens, all named Zebatinsky, was: What the devil is this?

Then he remembered, swore

mildly and began reading.

It started on the American side. Marshall Zebatinsky (fingerprints) had been born in Buffalo, New York (date, hospital statistics). His father had been born in Buffalo as well, his mother in Oswego, New York. His paternal grandparents had both been born in Bialystok, Poland, (date of entry into the United States, dates of citizenship, photographs.)

The seventeen Russian and Polish citizens named Zebatinsky had all been descendants of people who, some half century earlier, had lived in or near Bialystok. Presumably, they could be relatives, but this was not explicitly stated in any particular case. (Vital statistics in East Europe during the aftermath of World War I were kept poorly, if at all.)

Brand passed through the individual life-histories of the current Zebatinsky men and women. Amazing how thoroughly intelligence did its work; probably theirs was as thorough. He stopped at one and his smooth forehead sprouted lines as his eyebrows shot upward. He put that one to one side and went on. Eventually, he stacked everything but that one and returned it to its envelope.

Staring at that one, he tapped a neatly-kept fingernail on the desk.

With a certain reluctance, he put in a call to Dr. Paul Kristow of the Atomic Energy Commission.

Dr. Kristow listened to the matter with a stony expression. He lifted a little finger occasionally to dab at his bulbous nose and remove a non-existent speck. His hair was iron gray, thinning and cut short. He might as well have been bald.

He said, "No, I never heard of any Russian Zebatinsky. But then, I never heard of the American one either."

"Well," Brand scratched at his hairline over one temple and said slowly, "I don't think there's anything to this, but I don't like to drop it too soon. I have a young lieutenant on my tail and you know what they can be like. I don't want to do anything that will drive him to a Congressional committee. Besides, the fact is that one of the Russian Zebatinsky fellows, Mikhail Andreyevich Zebatinsky, is a nuclear physicist. Are you sure you never heard of him?"

"Mikhail Andreyevich Zebatinsky? No. . . . No, I never did. Not that that proves anything."

"I could say it was coinci-

dence, but you know that would be piling it a trifle high. One Zebatinsky here and one Zebatinsky there, but nuclear physicists, and the one here suddenly changes his name to Sebatinsky, and goes around anxious about it, too. He won't allow misspelling. He says, emphatically, 'Spell my name with an S.' It all just fits well enough to make my spy-conscious lieutenant begin to look a little too good. And another peculiar thing is that the Russian Zebatinsky dropped out of sight just about a year ago."

Dr. Kristow said, stolidly, "Executed!"

"He might have been. Ordinarily, I would even assume so, though the Russians are not more foolish than we are and don't kill any nuclear physicist they can avoid killing. The thing is there's another reason why a nuclear physicist, of all people, might suddenly disappear. I don't have to tell you."

"Crash research; top secret. I take it that's what you mean. Do you believe that's it?"

"Put it together with everything else, add in the lieutenant's intuition, and I just begin to wonder."

"Give me that biography." Dr. Kristow reached for the

sheet of paper and read it over twice. He shook his head. Then he said, "I'll check this in *Nuclear Abstracts*."

VOLUMES of *Nuclear Abstracts* lined one wall of Dr. Kristow's study in neat little boxes, each filled with its squares of microfilm.

The A. E. C. man used his projector on the indices while Brand watched with what patience he could muster.

Dr. Kristow muttered, "A Mikhail Zebatinsky authored or co-authored half a dozen papers in the Soviet journals in the last half-dozen years. We'll get out the abstracts and maybe we can make something out of it. I doubt it."

A selector flipped out the appropriate squares. Dr. Kristow lined them up, ran them through the projector and by degrees an expression of odd intentness crossed his face. He said, "That's odd."

Brand said, "What's odd?"

Dr. Kristow sat back. "I'd rather not say just yet. Can you get me a list of any other nuclear physicist who's dropped out of sight in the Soviet Union in the last year."

"You mean you see something?"

"Not really. Not if I were just looking at any one of

these papers. It's just that looking at all of them and knowing that this man may be on a crash research program and, on top of that, having you putting suspicions in my head——" He shrugged. "It's nothing."

Brand said, earnestly, "I wish you'd say what's on your mind. We may as well be foolish about this together."

"If you feel that way—— It's just possible this man may have been inching toward gamma-ray reflection."

"And the significance?"

"If a reflecting shield against gamma rays could be devised, individual shelters could be built to protect against fallout. It's fallout that's the real danger, you know. A hydrogen bomb might destroy a city but the fallout could slow-kill the population over a strip thousands of miles long and hundreds wide."

Brand said quickly, "Are we doing any work on this?"

"No."

"And if they get it and we don't, they can destroy the United States *in toto* at the cost of, say, ten cities, after they have their shelter program completed."

"That's far in the future. And, what are we getting in a hurrah about? All this is

built on one man changing one letter in his name."

"All right, I'm insane," said Brand. "But I don't leave the matter at this point. Not at *this* point. I'll get you your list of disappearing nuclear physicists if I have to go to Moscow to get it."

HE GOT the list. They went through all the research papers authored by any of them. They called a full meeting of the Commission, then of the nuclear brains of the nation. Dr. Kristow walked out of an all night session, finally, during part of which the President himself had attended.

Brand met him. Both looked haggard and in need of sleep.

Brand said, "Well?"

Kristow nodded. "Most agree. Some are doubtful even yet, but most agree."

"How about you. Are you sure?"

"I'm far from sure, but let me put it this way. It's easier to believe that the Soviets are working on a gamma-ray shield than to believe that all the data we've uncovered has no interconnection."

"Has it been decided that we're to go on shield research, too?"

"Yes," Kristow's hand went

back over his short, bristly hair, making a dry, whispery sound. "We're going to give it everything we've got. Knowing the papers written by the men who disappeared, we can get right on their heels. We may even beat them to it. Of course, they'll find out we're working on it."

"Let them," said Brand. "Let them. It will keep them from attacking. I don't see any percentage in selling ten of our cities just to get ten of theirs—if we're both protected and they're too dumb to know that."

"But not too soon. We don't want them finding out *too* soon. What about the American Zebatinsky-Sebatinsky?"

Brand looked solemn and shook his head. "There's nothing to connect him with any of this even yet. We've *looked*. I agree with you, of course. He's in a sensitive spot where he is now and we can't afford to keep him there even if he's in the clear."

"We can't kick him out just like that, either, or the Russians will start wondering."

"Do you have any suggestions?"

They were walking down the long corridor toward the distant elevator in the emptiness of four in the morning.

Dr. Kristow said, "I've looked into his work. He's a good man, better than most, and not happy in his job, either. He hasn't the temperament for team work."

"So?"

"But he is the type for an academic job. If we can arrange to have a large university offer him a chair in physics, I think he would take it gladly. There would be enough non-sensitive areas to keep him occupied; we would be able to keep him in close view; *and* it would be a natural development. The Russians might not start scratching their heads. What do you think?"

Brand nodded. "It's an idea. Even sounds good. I'll put it up to the chief."

They stepped into the elevator and Brand allowed himself to wonder about it all. What an ending to what had started with one letter of a name.

MARSHALL Sebastinsky could hardly talk. He said to his wife, "I swear I don't see how this happened. I wouldn't have thought they knew me from a meson detector. Good Lord, Sophie, Associate Professor of Physics at Princeton! Think of it."

Sophie said, "Do you suppose it was your talk at the APS meetings?"

"I don't see how. It was a thoroughly uninspired paper once everyone in the division was done hacking at it." He snapped his fingers. "It must have been Princeton that was investigating me. That's it. You know all those forms I've been filling out in the last six months; those interviews they wouldn't explain. Honestly, I was beginning to think I was under suspicion as a subversive. It was Princeton investigating me. They're thorough."

"Maybe it was your name," said Sophie. "I mean the change."

"Watch me now. My professional life will be my own finally. I'll make my mark. Once I have a chance to do my work without—" He stopped and turned to look at his wife. "My name! You mean the S."

"You didn't get the offer till after you changed your name, did you?"

"Not till long after. No, that part's just coincidence. I've told you before Sophie, it was just a case of throwing out fifty dollars to please you. Lord, what a fool I've felt all these months, insisting on that stupid S."

Sophie was instantly on the defensive. "I didn't make you do it, Marshall. I suggested it but I didn't nag you about it. Don't say I did. Besides, it did turn out well. I'm sure it was the name that did this."

Sebatinsky smiled indulgently. "Now that's superstition."

"I don't care what you call it, but you're not changing your name back."

"Well, no, I suppose not. I've had so much trouble getting them to spell my name with an S, that the thought of making everyone move back is more than I want to face. Maybe I ought to change my name to Jones, eh?"

He laughed; but Sophie didn't. "You leave it alone!"

"Oh, all right, I'm just joking. Tell you what. I'll step down to that old fellow's place one of these days and tell him everything worked out and slip him another tenner. Will that satisfy you?"

He was exuberant enough to do so the next week. He assumed no disguise this time. He wore his glasses and his ordinary suit and was minus a hat.

He was even humming as he approached the storefront and stepped to one side to allow a weary, sour-faced wom-

an to maneuver her twin baby-carriage past.

He put his hand on the door-handle and his thumb on the iron latch. The latch didn't give to his thumb's downward pressure. The door was locked.

The dusty, dim card with "Numerologist" on it was gone, now that he looked. Another sign, printed and beginning to yellow and curl with the sunlight, said "To let."

Sebatinsky shrugged. That was that. He had tried to do the right thing.

HAROUND, happily divested of corporeal excrescence, capered happily and his energy vortices glowed a dim purple over cubic hypermiles. He said, "Have I won? Have I won?"

Mestack was withdrawn, his vortices almost a sphere of light in hyperspace. "I haven't calculated it yet."

"Well, go ahead. You won't change the results any by taking a long time. Wowf, it's a relief to get back into clean energy. It took me a microcycle of time as a corporeal body; a nearly used-up one, too. But it was worth it to show *you*."

Mestack said, "All right, I

admit you stopped a nuclear war on the planet."

"Is that or is that not a Class A effect?"

"It is a Class A effect. Of course it is."

"All right. Now check and see if I didn't get that Class A effect with a Class F stimulus. I changed one letter of one name."

"What's a 'name'?"

"Oh, never mind. It's all there. I've worked it out for you."

Mestack said reluctantly, "I yield. A Class F stimulus."

"Then I *win*. Admit it."

"Neither one of us will win when the Watchman gets a look at this."

Haround, who had been an elderly numerologist on Earth and was still somewhat unsettled with relief at no longer being one, said, "You weren't worried about that when you made the bet."

"I didn't think you'd be fool enough to go through with it."

"Heat-waste! Besides, why worry? The Watchman will never detect a Class F stimulus."

"Maybe not, but he'll detect a Class A effect. Those corporeals will still be around after a dozen microcycles. The Watchman will notice that."

"The trouble with you, Mestack, is that you don't want to pay off. You're stalling."

"I'll pay. But just wait till the Watchman finds out we've been working on an unassigned problem and made an unallowed-for change. Of course, if we—" He paused.

Haround said, "All right, we'll change it back. He'll never know."

There was a crafty glow to Mestack's brightening energy pattern. "You'll need another Class F stimulus if you expect him not to notice."

Haround hesitated. "I can do it."

"I doubt it."

"I could."

"Would you be willing to bet on that, too?" Jubilation was creeping into Mestack's radiations.

"Sure," said the goaded Haround. "I'll put those corporeals right back where they were and the Watchman will never know the difference."

Mestack followed through his advantage. "Suspend the first bet, then. Triple the stakes on the second."

The mounting eagerness of the gamble caught at Haround, too. "All right, I'm game. Triple the stakes."

"Done, then!"

"Done."



A Novelette

JOHN A. SENTRY

mark



LAURENCE looked over the papers while the DBA man waited, not very patiently. Lawrence took his time.

Altogether there were three papers:

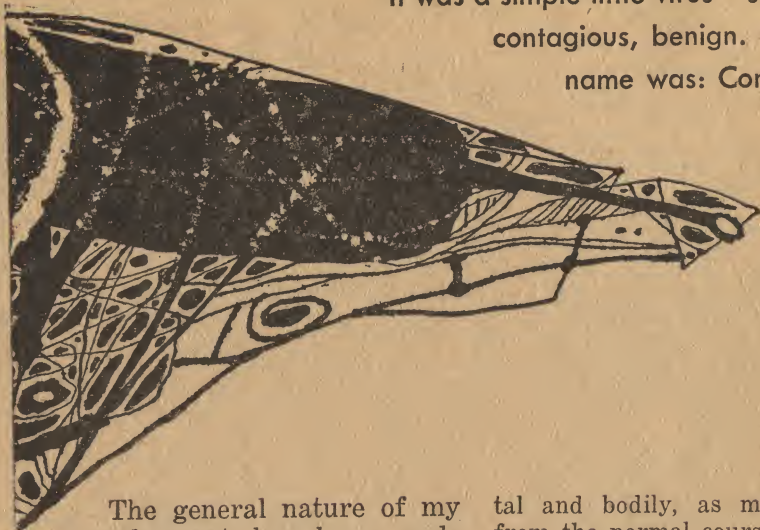
AFFIDAVIT OF AGREEMENT:

I, the undersigned Robert S. Lawrence, do hereby affirm and attest that I have this day of my own free choice entered

into contractual agreement with DBA CHEMICALS, INC., the nature of this agreement being as set forth below:

That, in return for the sum of one dollar and other good and valuable considerations, I shall undertake to participate in such experimental tests and/or programs of tests, as a subject, as DBA CHEMICALS, INC., shall specify as being relevant and proper to the prosecution and conclusion of a consistent and logical program of testing and experimentation.

It was a simple little virus—synthetic,
contagious, benign. Its other
name was: Conscience.



The general nature of my employment has been made known to me, and I have read and understood this affidavit.

Signature

Date March 23, 2160 AD

RELEASE FROM RESPONSIBILITY AND LIABILITY:

I, the undersigned Robert S. Lawrence, having been taken into the employ of DBA CHEMICALS, INC., a firm engaged in chemical research and experimentation, do hereby make the following Release:

It is my clear understanding that the employment which I have voluntarily undertaken with DBA CHEMICALS, INC., is of a hazardous nature. I do hereby absolve DBA CHEMICALS, INC., of all responsibility and liability for such injury or impairment of health, both men-

tal and bodily, as may result from the normal course of such employment. It is my clear understanding that DBA CHEMICALS, INC., being engaged in a program of experimental research, cannot guarantee my safety beyond providing such safeguards and working practices as have proven effective in past experience.

I have read and understood this Form of Release.

Signature

Date March 23, 2160 AD

The third paper was a deposit slip for the Second National Bank of Howard's Falls, Massachusetts, showing a deposit to the account of Robert S. or Dorothy T. Lawrence.

The amount of the deposit was ten thousand dollars.

THE DBA man extended a pen and looked meaningfully at his watch.

Lawrence took the pen firmly, and steadily signed his name.

"Robert S. Lawrence" once, "Robert S. Lawrence" twice, "Robert S. Lawrence" three times. Going . . . going . . . gone.

The sudden vagrant notion annoyed him. He frowned and deliberately let the pen fall point-first to the tabletop. The DBA man glared, but Lawrence ignored it. DBA could buy pens enough to sink a freighter.

Gone? He shrugged it off. He knew what he was doing. He even knew why he'd felt that twinge of uneasiness. His intellect had come to a decision, but his emotions still insisted on weighing the foregone conclusion. But his emotions would come around soon enough.

Lawrence felt satisfied with himself. Once a man understood his own inner workings, he could proceed without their hampering him.

Lawrence looked at Dorothy.

She was looking down at the floor, her lips etched around with grim lines. Suddenly her fingers clenched on the DBA check in her hand,

and the slip of green paper crumpled. She jerked her head part-way toward him and started to say something.

Then her shoulders lost their set, and she smoothed the check carefully. Her purse snapped open and the check dropped out of sight. Her purse snapped shut. She rose abruptly, thrust her arms into the sleeves of her shabby coat, and burst out of the room.

Lawrence shrugged and looked at the DBA man with a wry smile.

The DBA man was wiping his glasses with concentration.

Lawrence cleared his throat. The DBA man put his glasses back and raised his eyebrows. "Pardon?"

"Ready," Lawrence said.

The DBA man nodded and opened a door. "Through here."

II

LAWRENCE devoted his attention to the corridor they were walking down. It made no real difference whether he did or not, but the mature man was the well-oriented man.

The other people in the hall were of various kinds. Some of them were cut of better cloth than others. He saw two

or three men in business suits, like himself. These were usually in discussions with attendant personnel in splashed smocks—technicians. Lawrence observed that the men in the business suits directed all the conversations.

"This way, please." The DBA man unexpectedly held a door open. Lawrence stopped, and felt someone bump into him from behind. He turned.

It was a girl—a technician. He noticed her coal-gray eyes and dark hair. He smiled warmly. "Please excuse me, miss."

She looked up briefly, and found some sign in his face that marked it as different from the other business suits. "'Sall right," she said perfunctorily. She moved around him with a deprecatory wave of her hand, her eyes returning to the planographed booklet she had been studying.

The smile plunged out of Lawrence's face.

When one was a child, one knew the systematic way of the world. It was in the natural order of things that a man started modestly, gained steadily through the years, and at last arrived at his chosen summit.

Frank's only a mail clerk? Well, certainly—but someday

he'll be President of the company. You wait and see.

Well, of course I'm certain! Why else would he have ever taken the job?

You say Frank's forty-seven already? Are you sure? Odd. Well, he must be an exception. I? I ever be an exception, too?

"This way, please," the DBA man repeated impatiently.

Lawrence took his eyes off the girl's retreating figure and walked quickly through the door. He saw a man leaning against a desk, wearing a laboratory smock over his business suit. Lawrence deduced he must be a supervisory technician of some sort.

"This is Mr. Lawrence," the DBA man said, introducing him to the supervisor, who mashed out his cigarette and gave Lawrence a prolonged inspection.

"I'm Bert Grove," he said.

Lawrence mentally classified him.

Shake, pal—call me Bert!

Here was a man who must have completed at least twelve years of advanced study. He had been working here at DBA or at some comparable firm long enough to acquire a large measure of authority. But: Shake, pal—call me by my nickname, be-

cause, positively, I do not feel myself to be better than you. I assure you.

Lawrence did not, of course, allow this judgment to appear on his features. Nothing appeared on his features. He shook Grove's hand, his face wooden. "How do you do?"

The DBA man walked back to the door. "You've got Mr. Lawrence's file, Dr. Grove?"

Grove nodded and jerked a thumb at his desk. The DBA man opened the door. "Well, then, Mr. Lawrence, I'll leave you with Dr. Grove. I'm sure you'll be happy here at DBA." He closed the door behind him.

Grove looked quizzically at Lawrence. "DBA opens its arms to you," he said dryly. Obviously, this was intended to give the impression he wore no man's collar—to put him and Lawrence on an equal footing. But Lawrence refused him the opening, keeping his face a mask, and after a moment Grove shrugged and indicated a chair. "Seat."

"Thank you." Twitching his trouser legs up at the knee, Lawrence waited until Grove sat down behind his desk.

Grove looked at Lawrence from under his sandy eyebrows. "Do you know what we're doing here?"

Cautiously, Lawrence said, "I read all the proper releases when I signed them."

GROVE gestured impatiently. "Everybody does that." He searched through a lower desk drawer. "They shove that check under their noses," he muttered, "and they forget what they've read." He tossed a pad of printed forms onto the desk. He ignored Lawrence's indignation. "And everybody signs. What else?" Grove demanded. "I don't understand your meaning," Lawrence said frigidly.

"What else do you know?" Grove reiterated. "Nothing? I thought so." Grove cursed with his face. "Easy money, eh? You know what we're going to do to you? 'Course not. Look—DBA has a government contract to develop the next model of the standard anti - interrogation device. What does that mean to you? If interrogative techniques have evolved to where they're the most important branch of practical psychology, what do you think testing an anti-interrogation device entails? What did you think all those 'mental health' clauses were for?"

Lawrence smiled thinly. So, Grove was a bully, as well.

Grove caught the expression. He barked a laugh. "Sorry. Don't know when I'm not wanted. Character flaw, I suppose." He calmed his manner a little.

Lawrence kept silent. Interesting, how a man could recognize his own deficiencies—verbally.

Sorry. I'm afraid I occasionally kick dogs. It's a character flaw, I'll admit. And now that I've made things all right by admitting it, you won't mind if I do it some more, will you?

Before one comes to understand mankind, one assumes that everyone else is like oneself . . . that everyone not only recognizes his own deficiencies but is also desperately interested in eliminating them:

Say, Charlie—I saw a very interesting advertisement in the paper this morning. It was about a new kind of chewing gum that positively knocks out bad breath for hours. Have a piece?

Unconsciously, Lawrence reached up and fingered the bridge of his nose.

" . . . need some more information," Grove was saying.

"Pardon me?"

Grove was holding an uncapped pen. Lawrence observed that it was the same make

and model as the personnel man's had been.

"I read your file," Grove repeated patiently. "It's not enough for our purposes here in the labs. I've got to get some more dope on you."

He ran his pen down the blanks in the form, checking off the spaces he'd already filled. "Name, Robert Service Lawrence . . ." he muttered, "Eyes brown, hair gray-black, age forty-two, height six feet——"

"Five feet, eleven inches," Lawrence amended.

Grove twitched his cheeks, gave Lawrence a disgusted look, and did not make the change. "Weight, one seventy-five . . . How'd you come to take this job?" Grove looked Lawrence full in the eyes and grinned sarcastically.

Lawrence felt himself coloring. "It has a certain adventurous appeal," he said clearly, his voice brittle. "It is, at the same time an opportunity to be of help to Humanity."

"Uh-huh." Grove bent over the form. He scribbled across the long blank space, muttering the words in unison with his pen-strokes. ". . . did not do it for the money . . ."

THE remainder of the day was confined to a physical

examination. Lawrence chafed at it, but Grove dismissed the work of Personnel Department's physician with an obscene gesture when Lawrence stiffly pointed out the medical chart already in his file.

"Get this straight, Lawrence. Out in Personnel, they're optimists. All they want to know is whether you'll hold together long enough to get to me. In here, I'm a realist. I want to know how much longer you'll wear after that. And you can forget about Personnel entirely. I don't care what they told you—and neither do they. I'll treat you as fairly as possible, but from now on I'm the only man you've got any appeal to. You can't go over my head with a complaint, and you can't pick and choose between what you're going to do and what you won't. I'm your boss, and you'll listen to me. I can still pick up a phone and have payment stopped on that check you didn't take this job for."

Grove pulled an instrument contact away from Lawrence's scalp, looked at the reading, and grunted.

"What kind of cure'd you take? Antabuse, A.A., psychotherapy or what?"

Lawrence set his lips. "I

don't know what you're talking about."

Grove looked at him wearily. "You're an ex-alcoholic. I want to know how you went about getting over it. Never bluff a doctor—he doesn't give a damn for any human foible except one; willful resistance to admitting human foibles."

Lawrence glared down at the floor. "Withdrawal," he said, angrily raising his head. "I just stopped drinking. It wasn't a serious case. I was overworked, and the condition occurred before I even noticed it."

Grove put the instrument down, made a final entry on his chart, closed it, and began unbuttoning his smock. "That is all, Lawrence," he sighed. "You can get dressed." He dropped the chart in a drawer and locked it. "We've got a room for you to live in, and your meals will be brought to you. You'll find that we do a fair job of keeping you comfortable."

HE WAITED until Lawrence was dressed, then grunted, "Follow me," unlocked a door into a narrow, empty corridor, and locked it again behind them. Still silent, he led Lawrence a short distance down the hall, un-

locked another door, and stepped into a large, well-furnished room that substituted deep murals for windows.

"You'll live here. You'll find clothes in the bureau. Leave your suit here in the morning. It'll be picked up, cleaned, and stored for you. The bath is through that door. The couch opens into a bed. Try and keep the place neat, because there's no maid service. You'll get your calls to report to me and whatnot over that interphone dingus on the desk. If there are any books you'd care to read, or tapes you want, make a list and just leave it anywhere in the room, face up, in plain sight. Within reason, we'll try to furnish them. And now, Mr. Lawrence, DBA bids you good night."

Grove stalked out of the room without waiting for a reply, and closed the door.

Lawrence smiled thinly. Obviously, Grove was angered at his persistent refusal to be overawed by the doctor's bullying tactics. Obviously, too, Grove was a brusque bully because he felt, for reasons that might or might not be well-founded in the ordinary case, that whatever he did to his subjects should not be demanded of humans.

Lawrence shrugged. Probably, Grove had never before worked with a man capable of truly maintaining a calm and organized mental attitude. Whatever kind of experimentation Grove might engage in while developing his "anti-interrogation device"—whatever that might be—Lawrence felt quite sure of his ability to emerge with his mind unscathed. His mind was by far the stronger of his two parts.

That there might be a definite risk of some bodily damage, Lawrence was quite ready to admit. "Hazardous experimentation" quite naturally called up an impression of laboratory work, with its usual danger of explosions, acid spatters, and the like. But Lawrence had evaluated that risk from the first. Medical science, after all, could practically rebuild an entire man from a few scraps of tissue. Painlessly.

He sat and read calmly from the library already in the room, until supper arrived from a compartment in one wall. It was quite a good meal, and he ate most of it before he replaced the dishes and utensils in the compartment.

After supper, he read for a little while longer, but found

himself growing sleepy while it was still two hours short of his usual midnight bedtime. He undressed, being careful to remove his personal effects from his suit, and went into the bathroom to wash.

There he discovered that the same sanatorium equipment with which he was familiar had been installed. The mirror was metal, and buried in the wall. There were no projecting overhead lights or piping, and such things as the tub and washbasin were a firm but slightly yielding plastic. The tub, he knew, would regulate the level of its water from his displacement, and would drain immediately if his head should slip under water.

He returned to the other room. Examining the furnishings, he found that their design was much more subtle, and more effective, than even the best sanatorium furniture in not offering projections or sharp edges to injure him.

He tried to conceive of a kind of accident the room might nevertheless permit, and couldn't.

Accidents, of course, were not the only possibility. With a kind of deliberation, he opened the bureau and examined his new clothes, which consisted of no more than

several sets of white shorts and blouses, and a pair of foam slippers.

No, not shorts. What he had mistaken for them were simple sarong-like skirts. And the blouses proved to be loose sleeveless singlets which dropped over the head.

Odd. But as he handled the fabric, he saw why the clothes had to have as few wear-points as possible. They were extremely friable, with very little tensile strength. They would never form a rope from which a man could hang himself.

Nevertheless, except for a brief flash which he quickly dismissed, he felt no disquiet.

III

THE lights had gone out as soon as he lay down on the sheetless thermal bed, but he was not yet quite asleep. He missed Dorothy, and that in itself was enough to intrigue him. It was not one of the feelings he had foreseen for himself. Dorothy was incapable of arousing the deeper emotions, and he had assumed that his sense of duty and obligation to her dependence on him would be satisfied by her present financial security.

The fact of darkness might have something to do with it,

he ruminated. In the sanatorium, when he was being dried out, she had quite often come to see whether he was sleeping well, or to bring him one of his regulated medicinal drinks when it was obvious that he was not.

Quite possibly, a part of his unconscious mind was reacting to the stimuli of darkness and this return to a sanatorium atmosphere.

Dorothy, he reflected, was such an unlikely source of the companionship and comfort he now missed. She had been of that "dedicated" breed of nurse, well past thirty, plain-faced and wan, that seeks to atone for its inwardly-felt shortcomings as a human being by making a crusade of healing and service. He had no idea of what deficiencies Dorothy found in herself, but whatever they were, she had ended in marrying one of her patients—doubtless in a mixture of loneliness, fear of approaching age, and a desire to make something of him.

Lawrence shrugged. He could hardly feel obligated to cater to Dorothy's quirks of motivation. Anyway, he had, after all, finally made a financial success of sorts.

GROVE said without preamble the next morning:

"You're entitled to know just what's being done to you. Briefly, it's this: we're developing a new modification on the standard method of preventing the unauthorized verbal passage of data—I suppose just so much gibberish to you."

Lawrence remained non-committal, sitting in his chair in Grove's laboratory and looking steadily at the doctor.

"Uh-huh. Well, the current standard armed services device is the Mark Nine AID, the initials standing for 'Anti-Interrogation Device.' It's not a mechanism or a system of training. It's a semi-intelligent virus that sets up housekeeping in a man's brain. Scare you? Well, Mark IX shouldn't. It's a very docile symbiote. It has a simple memory of its own, which functions only to keep it organized. It has a correspondingly simple organization. One part cuts into the brain centers that control the autonomic nervous system, and just sits there. Another part borrows some of your memory cells. And a third part rides herd on your conscience; your ethics, your morals—whatever you call it. That part of you also has a discrete portion of your brain for its residence, and the AID knows where it is. That's all."

Lawrence shrugged.

Grove twitched, but went on. "It has three triggers. One of them is set off when you tell somebody something you shouldn't, do something you shouldn't, or in some other way make your conscience twinge. And don't kid yourself—nobody's sophisticated enough a traitor so that his childhood respect for the things he learned then won't kick up when he blabs what he shouldn't. Something wins. The AID feels it. The AID feels it even before he is able to translate intention into action—and so he never performs the action. The AID shoots a restimulation into his conscience, and all of a sudden he's not a traitor any more. His ethics intensify.

"Similarly, if he's not a traitor but he's reached his physical or psychological breaking point, the AID knows it. It spots his intention of stopping the torture by giving in, and it stops him, it knocks him out and paralyzes him. If it feels him being drugged or hypnotized, it does the same. *It* can't be drugged or hypnotized.

"Finally, if everything else fails, it kills him.

"That doesn't happen very often—it's common knowledge that AIDs will do it, and

pushing a man to that point is now accepted as murder. Besides, it's useless. And, though this is not common knowledge, worse than useless. By the time a man has reached the point where he has to die in order to safeguard the data he holds, that data has become the most important thing in the universe to him. He's been practically shouting it aloud inside his head, over and over. The AID's had a chance to memorize it. It holds on until it has to kill the man, and then leaves his body. It doesn't like death—it gets out. And looks for a new host. AIDs're a virus. Virii're contagious. The nearest individual catches it, like a cold. And the AID, if its host is now an enemy, doesn't like what it finds. It's memorized one conscience pattern, and it can't quite adjust to the new one.

"So the AID tries to adjust the pattern. It doesn't do very well. But then, it doesn't have to. All it has to do is change one or two settings on the scale of relative ethical values. It's a statistical fact that every AID ever issued has been accounted for. Every AID belonging to a captured man has functioned perfectly within its limitations. Almost every AID which found a new

host in an enemy of our armed services has brought that enemy home to us with the information he was trying to extract.

"It's an additional sidelight that over ninety-nine percent of those defecting enemies remained loyal to their original ideals—but the AID had somehow convinced them that they were serving those ideals best by coming to us. You don't care, do you, Lawrence?"

"I'm listening."

"So do pet mice."

"Dr. Grove——"

"The Mark IX AID, however," Grove went on, overriding Lawrence, "has severe limitations which were revealed at what was, fortunately, very near the end of the recent Eglin war. These were:" Grove held up three fingers,

"ONE: A lack of duration-sense. We recently received an item of information from an AID riding an enemy host it captured near the middle of the Eglin war, some fifteen years ago.

"Heading (A) under that: a concomitant inability to utilize a duration-sense if it had one. That message would have shortened the war if the AID had known communica-

tions code and forced its host to use a beam transmitter.

"Two: If its host were captured, kept in a sealed room, and kept alive, the AID would not function so long as the host was also not questioned. The Eglins used that trick to isolate information that had been passed on to Eglin hosts. Sometimes it made no difference, but sometimes it kept us from getting something we could have used. Granted, the Eglins wasted a lot of time and effort on people of theirs who had simply decided to desert. But there were several things we should have found out, and didn't.

"Three: General uncertainty. The Mark IX AID, in the extremely vital function of moving from one host to another, operates in a very catch - as - catch - can fashion. Sometimes it picks somebody too stupid to desert successfully. We don't like that. We want something we can bet on. But we can't get it with the present functional equivalent of a high-grade moron.

"And, in Heading (A) under *that*, you can append the confusion that results when dozens of AIDs, with their hosts dead in battle, try to cram into the survivors. It works, but it drains the hosts' metabolism to have to support

a number of symbiotes. Moreover, in most of those cases, nothing but a duplication of effort results. We need an AID that will know when to move on and when to recognize that it's unnecessary. We need, in short, an AID that's as intelligent as a genius-grade man."

LAURENCE looked coldly at Grove. He wondered if the man had finally stopped trying to impress him with this parade of biochemical esoterics, or whether there was going to be more before the doctor decided he'd killed enough time.

Lawrence had to admit a certain apprehension. It was nothing beyond his control, but it was natural that the day the program actually began would find him somewhat nervous, despite his intellectual preparedness for anything Grove and DBA might be planning for him. He only wished Grove would begin.

Grove saw his look, and smiled with some kind of inner amusement that was both sad and savage.

"Here at DBA, where nothing gets done on a small scale, we've devoted quite a bit of thought to that, and quite a bit of money. A lot of both has gone under the bridge. So

have a few volunteers. But we've got it worked out, now. Of course, we thought so on the last three failures, too. However, we've now got an AID that moves in and lives in the entire brain and nervous system. It's just as smart as the host, to begin with, and it goes on from there, learning and rearranging. It discards all erroneous data it might find there, removes all blocks to the free flow of information, and ensures itself of an ideally healthy environment. Or, rather, it's supposed to. It's supposed to be completely rational and sane. At critical-level operation, it should be able to think its host's way out of any difficulty mere humans or Eglins or whathaveyou might put up, and at times of no-stress it's supposed to leave the host's individuality unimpaired.

"Of course, sometimes it seems to rearrange a bit too thoroughly. That's what the soft furniture and suicide-proof furnishings are for. And sometimes it doesn't quite get the hang of handling the nervous system. And sometimes it causes complete paralysis. Oh, well, that's what you signed up for." Grove lifted a hypodermic pistol and shot it off into Lawrence's forearm.

"Meet Mark X," he said, and his face twisted. Lawrence had never before seen anyone, even Dorothy, look at him with so much compassion.

IV

LAWRENCE could see his room changing colors and shapes. The yielding mattress under his itching body ran a gamut of textures and temperatures. His bones ached, and the migraine wedged itself into the bones of his skull. The air tasted sweet, salt, and lemony on his tongue as he breathed it in convulsive sighs and shallow sips. His heart seemed to be leaping at his throat, fluttering as it hung there, and subsiding to a stethoscopic whisper as Mark X ranged wildly inside his brain, blundering about.

At intervals he could not time, Grove spoke to him through the interphone, his face set and his voice urgent, though Lawrence's ears selected first the bass ranges and then the treble. He felt that days must have passed, but he knew that could be a delusion.

"Lawrence, do the best you can. Our instruments show you're not in any critical stage, yet. Hang on and fight it out. We're pulling air samples out of your room, and

they're teeming with virus. I can't send you anyone to take care of you."

Lawrence was trembling on the edge of delirium. He felt as he had felt in the long nights at the sanatorium, when the first faint scuttlings began to sound in the corners of the room.

He swooped downward.

"Dorothy!" he gasped, clutching for the night bell. "Dorothy, *I can't find. . .*"

IN HIS head were doors, and behind the doors were voices. Something threw itself at the rusty hasps, and the frozen hinges scaled off their armor of oxide. The doors shivered in their frames. The voices leaked through in snatches, as the doors bent, and in fragments as they snapped back.

"You say Frank's forty——"

"—usiness suit——"

"Control yourse——"

"—someday, you'll see."

"Gum?"

"—*have to be the best!*"

"Gum?"

"—better cloth——"

"—stigmatu——"

"Planograph."

The voices were all his own; all echoing like the pieces of sound that fall from communicators when the dials

are spun across the band. Bass and treble, old and young, out of his far, far past and out of yesterday.

"The mature man is——"

"—kick dogs——"

"Mind?"

"I overworked and it crept up on me."

He felt the most intolerable agony of his life with each blow against those doors, and with every springing-back into silence he had relief from pain until the next.

"Gum?"

Each door locked off a tight compartment in his mind—a compartment he could enter and leave many, many times each day, simply by giving the magic passwords: "I need comfort" and "I need pain," but which no one could ever enter by battering down the doors so there could be no secret places when he needed them.

Now he saw the battering ram as himself. He saw himself hurtling at a door, his head sunk in his shoulders, cringing from the smash that must come. The door grew with insane speed, and he knew that in the next second. No.

"I'll die!"

And he stopped.

He flopped over on his back, feeling his muscles limp

as yarn, and looked up into Dorothy's shimmering face.

HE TOOK a weak breath. He was still in his room in the DBA building. He ran his hand over his face and found at least a four-day beard. Dorothy, wearing some kind of transparent fabric oversuit and a sealed helmet over her head, was bending over the interphone on the desk. Cylinders of air were strapped to her back. Her voice came mutedly through a diaphragm in the helmet.

"He's conscious and rational, Doctor. He came out of delirium about five minutes ago—it hadn't seemed that long—"and his pulse is weak, but steady. He's breathing evenly. The rictus is gone. Any instructions?"

Looking past her, Lawrence could see it was Grove she was talking to. Grove was red-eyed and haggard, his collar hanging loose from one flap, and his voice was thick.

"No. As long as he's recovering, I don't want any drugs in him to foul up our readings; he can take care of himself. What about you?"

Dorothy looked at a series of dials set into the left wristlet of her suit. "The suit count's up. I don't feel anything in particular yet."

"Hard to tell, under the fatigue symptoms, I'd say," Grove told her. "If you feel yourself developing anything out of the ordinary, push him out of bed and lie down yourself. Get that suit off and stuff it in the food slot. I'll dilate it when I see you getting ready. Be sure and give yourself plenty of time—if you're wearing that thing and you convulse like he did, you'll be in trouble."

"What's happening?" Lawrence burst out. He pushed himself up in the bed, his head ringing.

Grove's mouth curled into a wan copy of its usual grimace at him.

"DBA wakes you with a smile, Mr. Lawrence. You've now had your bout with the Mark X AID. Unfortunately, your wife is just starting hers. Are you a good nurse, Mr. Lawrence?"

Lawrence ignored his nervous flippancy. "Doctor Grove, what is Dorothy doing here?" he demanded.

Grove looked at him for a moment before he answered. When he did, his voice was bitter, and Lawrence had the impression that his bitterness was as much at himself as at anything else.

"You mentioned her name first, Mr. Lawrence. When we

saw you were in a critically convulsive state, I called for volunteers to go in and nurse you. But everybody around here knew how effective a virus-proof suit is. So I called your wife. She also volunteered, and I find myself forced to believe that she didn't do it for the money, either."

LAWRENCE sat in a chair, watching Dorothy. He'd taken off the suit and put it inside the serving compartment, and Grove had immediately closed off the opening. The apartment was curiously bare. Rubbery panels had slid over the walls at some point in Lawrence's own sickness, and most of the furniture had gone down into the floor. There was only the bed, with Dorothy lying on it, her eyes closed and her breath a trifle loud in her throat, and the chair in which, weak as he still was, he had to sit most of the time.

They hadn't exchanged more than two or three sentences between his waking up and her suddenly un-coordinated fumbling at the suit fasteners. But Lawrence knew that even with much more time, very little more would have passed between them. Dorothy was not of a talka-

tive nature, and neither was he. She had long ago come to know his habits and moods, and she reacted to them by their non-verbal signals. Whether she interpreted them accurately or not was unimportant. Whatever she thought she was observing, her responses were right.

She had known, certainly, without his having to tell her, that he was grateful.

Exactly what kind of gratitude she imagined it was, he did not know—nor did he see that it was necessary for him to know. If she chose to visualize it as a kind of romantic inner glow on his part, then he would do nothing to destroy her impression.

Actually, he *was* somewhat surprised that her dedication had extended itself this far.

But he was much more interested in what the AID virus had done to him. Had it, for example, made him moan like that in his unconsciousness? And if so, what had been going through his mind at the time?

All his sins? What sins, he wondered abstractedly, did Dorothy possess?

But what final effect had there been?

Grove had implied a great deal—a mental rearrangement, if nothing else.

He remembered the doors fantasy, and pursed his lips. Well, had he changed?

He shook his head, and a cold smile touched his face. He'd been correct in his estimate of himself. The doors had not been broken by Grove's experiment. He had fought off the "rearrangement." He was just as sane now as he'd been before he came to DBA.

He leaned forward as Dorothy suddenly arched her back and screamed through her clenched teeth. Had he done that?

He got up slowly, sat down on the bed beside Dorothy, took her stiff hand, and began patting it.

V

TWO days, now.

And Grove, on the interphone screen, looked as though he hadn't yet been to bed. Lawrence was almost positive that his clothes were the same he'd worn the day Lawrence had awakened. But this was hardly important to Lawrence. He wanted to get out of the room, and he knew he could not. He was terrified by what was happening to Dorothy. He held the communicator up in trembling hands so Grove could see the bed more clearly.

"You can stop that," Grove snapped impatiently. "We've got a dozen viewers into that room."

Lawrence set the interphone down shakily, moved his hands without knowing what to do next, and finally retreated to the far corner of the room.

Dorothy was looking better. That was the essence of it—the terrifying essence of it. Though she still thrashed back and forth on the bed, and though she mumbled constantly in a voice too slurred to understand, she was almost visibly getting better. Better than Lawrence had ever known her.

There was color in her lips and cheeks; not the hot flare of fever but the soft, rose glow she might have had as a young girl, once. Though her hair was straggling and knotted, its flat lackluster was gone—it shone with the honey glow that he had never seen. Her epidermis had begun to peel in patches last night. Now most of it had come off, and under that dead, dry layer her skin was soft and unlined. Her face had smoothed—the faint crows' feet were no longer visible at the corners of her eyes.

She was still a plain woman. Her bones were still too

big, and her features too broad. But even in a coma, she had somehow acquired a cleanness and fresh attractiveness.

And her husband was terrified.

"Not like your case at all," he heard Grove faintly say through the interphone. "There was one brief period when we got a short surge of metabolic readings from you that correspond to hers now, but not in any duration or intensity like this. Something's happening to her, all right. Something that didn't take with you. And she's running through this syndrome a lot faster than you did. You didn't even begin anything like this for another thirty-six hours.

"I'm not sure what it all means, either. None of the previous volunteer tests, with earlier batches of virus, turned up anything like this. I'm pretty close to being just as lost as you are, until she comes out of it."

Dorothy's muttering became louder, but no more intelligible. She seemed to be moving her legs and arms more violently. Lawrence stared at her.

"Hold her down, man! She's going to convulse!" Grove shouted.

Lawrence moved tentatively toward the bed.

"Hurry up! Do you want her to kill herself?"

Lawrence forced himself to move. He held her down uncertainly, feeling the violence coiling in her muscles. The mutter had risen to a slurred shout, and now he could begin to understand what she was saying.

"All," she was repeating over and over. "All — all — all — all —" She tore herself loose from Lawrence's indecisive grip, her mouth contorted open.

"All — all — all —"

"Judas! Look at that synapse reading!" somebody shouted faintly from behind Grove.

"All — all — ALL DOWN!"

Dorothy's muscles uncoiled fluidly, stretched smoothly, and relaxed. Her chest heaved in one indrawn sigh, and her eyes opened. She looked up at Lawrence and smiled. "Hello, Robert."

Lawrence stared at her. "Hello. Hello, Dorothy," he managed.

Suddenly her smile faded. Her eyes searched his face, and gradually a deep and ineradicable sadness crept into them.

"You look worn, Robert. It didn't happen to you."

Even in sadness, her face was one of the most beautiful he had ever seen. That sadness, and that beauty, touched him in some place he had never known before.

He shook his head. "No, darling. Whatever it was didn't happen to me."

THEY sat together in the room, neither of them looking at each other. Lawrence stared blankly down at the floor, his fingers knotted together. Dorothy kept her eyes averted as she talked to him. She spoke hesitantly.

"The chances are safely low that nobody's observing us at this hour," she said.

Lawrence grunted. He felt a numbness spreading slowly out toward his fingertips.

He was an exception, too.

"The—the AID does exactly what Grove said it ought to," Dorothy went on. "More exactly, perhaps, than he thought. It demands a healthy, rational environment. It creates one. It gives its host... sanity." Her voice grew embarrassed. Lawrence flashed an angry look up to her face, and saw that she was blushing with awkwardness toward him, her eyes downcast. She reached out and put her hands over his own. "It couldn't give it to you. You would

have died, first. It knew that, and withdrew. I can't think of any other explanation, from what you've told me."

"Why don't you ask it—or its brother, or whatever's squatting in your skull?" he demanded bitterly.

"I can't, Robert," she said gently, but with her hands shaking just a trifle. "I can't feel it. Even when I need it, if I ever do, to help me out of some crisis, I won't be able to talk to it, any more than I can talk to my arm. It's a part of me. It's a symbiote, not a parasite."

Lawrence pulled his hands out from under hers and held them safely at his sides.

One knows the systematic way of the world. One begins with small means, but with the course of time—with planning, with application, with rigorous discipline, one forges to the chosen summit.

Except that some men were mail clerks at forty-three.

"Robert?"

"What?"

"I doubt if Grove's thought of this. He's interested in the military applications of the AIDs, and he despises himself for the way he has to work. He tries to concentrate his attention on one narrow aspect, and to think about it as little as possible when there's no

obvious need for it. He won't think of another factor for some time, if ever. By then, we'll be free to leave this room, and DBA, as well. I know I can persuade Grove to give his permission.

"Robert, the AIDs belong to everybody. There's no person in this world, no matter who or what, that doesn't deserve sanity if he can have it.

"I can't give it to them. But you can. You've been exposed to the virus, but you were immune to it. It's in your bloodstream, or in your skin, or your respiratory system—it's there, somewhere, and you can pass it on to people. You're a carrier. Of sanity."

She dropped her voice. "But you can never have it for yourself."

Lawrence smashed his fists together. He felt the bitterness tear deep into him. "Why me? Why is it me, that's trapped this way?"

"I don't know. I wish it had been the other way around."

He turned on her. "It could have been, just as easily. What made you be the one?"

Dorothy looked at him with the sadness he would come to always know, and always live with.

"Maybe," she said, "because I was the one who didn't want to be superhuman."

He had no name—or couldn't remember it. But the things that he saw that morning, the agonized world would never forget.



daybroke

ROBERT BLOCH

UP IN the sky the war-heads whirled, and the thunder of their passing shook the mountain.

Deep in his vaulted sanctuary he sat, godlike and inscrutable, marking neither the sparrow's or the missile's

fall. There was no need to leave his shelter to stare down at the city.

He knew what was happening—had known ever since early in the evening when the television flickered and died. An announcer in the holy

white garb of the healing arts had been delivering an important message about the world's most popular laxative—the one most people preferred, the one four out of five doctors used themselves. Midway in his praise of this amazing new medical discovery he had paused and advised the audience to stand by for a special bulletin.

But the bulletin never came; instead the screen went blank and the thunder boomed.

All night long the mountain trembled, and the seated man trembled too; not with anticipation but with realization. He had expected this, of course, and that was why he was here. Others had talked about it for years; there had been wild rumors and solemn warnings and much muttering in taverns. But the rumor-mongers and the warning-sounders and the tavern-mutterers had made no move. They had stayed in the city and he alone had fled.

Some of them, he knew, had stayed to stave off the inevitable end as best they could, and these he saluted for their courage. Others had attempted to ignore the future, and these he detested for their blindness. And all of them he pitied.

For he had realized, long ago, that courage was not enough and that ignorance was no salvation. Wise words and foolish words are one—they will not halt the storm. And when the storm approaches, it is best to flee.

So he had prepared for himself this mountain retreat, high over the city, and here he was safe; would be safe for years to come. Other men of equal wealth could have done the same, but they were too wise or too foolish to face reality. So while they spread their rumors and sounded their warnings and muttered in their cups, he built his sanctuary; lead-guarded, amply provisioned, and stocked with every need for years to come, including even a generous supply of the world's most popular laxative.

DAWN came at last and the echoes of the thunder died, and he went to a special, shielded place where he could sight his spyglass at the city. He stared and he squinted, but there was nothing to be seen—nothing but swirling clouds that billowed blackly and rolled redly across the hazed horizon.

Then he knew that he must go down to the city if he

wanted to find out, and made due preparations.

There was a special suit to wear, a cunning seamless garment of insulated cloth and lead, difficult and costly to obtain. It was a top secret suit; the kind only Pentagon generals possess. They cannot procure them for their wives, and they must steal them for their mistresses. But he had one. He donned it now.

An elevated platform aided his descent to the base of the mountain, and there his car was waiting. He drove out, the shielded doors closing automatically behind him, and started for the city. Through the eyepiece of his insulated helmet he stared out at a yellowish fog, and he drove slowly, even though he encountered no traffic nor any sign of life.

After a time the fog lifted, and he could see the countryside. Yellow trees and yellow grass stood stiffly silhouetted against a yellow sky in which great clouds writhed and whirled.

Van Gogh's work, he told himself, knowing it was a lie. For no artist's hand had smashed the windows of the farmhouses, peeled the paint from the sides of the barns, or squeezed the warm breath from the herds huddling in

the fields, standing fright-frozen but dead.

He drove along the broad arterial leading to the city; an arterial which ordinarily swarmed with the multicolored corpuscles of motor vehicles. But there were no cars moving today, not in this artery.

Not until he neared the suburbs did he see them, and then he rounded a curve and was halfway upon the vanguard before he panicked and halted in a ditch.

The roadway ahead was packed with automobiles as far as the eye could see—a solid mass, bumper to bumper, ready to descend upon him with whirring wheels.

But the wheels were not turning.

The cars were dead. The further stretches of the highway were an automotive graveyard. He approached the spot on foot, treading with proper reverence past the Cadillac-corpses, the cadavers of Chevrolets, the bodies of Buicks. Close at hand he could see the evidence of violent ends; the shattered glass, the smashed fenders, the battered bumpers and twisted hoods.

The signs of struggle were often pitiable to observe; here was a tiny Volkswagen, trap-

ped and crushed between two looming Lincolns; there an MG had died beneath the wheels of a charging Chrysler. But all were still now. The Dodges dodged no longer, the Hornets had ceased their buzzing, and the Ramblers would never ramble again.

It was hard for him to realize with equal clarity the tragedy that had overtaken the people inside these cars—they were dead, too, of course, but somehow their passing seemed insignificant. Maybe his thinking had been affected by the attitude of the age, in which a man tended to be less and less identified as an individual and more and more regarded on the basis of the symbolic status of the car he drove. When a stranger rode down the street, one seldom thought of him as a person; one's only immediate reaction was, "There goes a Ford—there goes a Pontiac—there goes one of those big goddam Imperials." And men bragged about their cars instead of their characters. So somehow the death of the automobiles seemed more important than the death of their owners. It didn't seem as though human beings had perished in this panic-stricken effort to escape from the city; it was the cars which had made a dash for

final freedom and then failed.

He skirted the road now and continued along the ditch until he came to the first sidewalks of the suburbs. Here the evidence of destruction was accentuated. Explosion and implosion had done their work. In the country, paint had been peeled from the walls, but in the suburbs walls had been peeled from the buildings. Not every home was leveled. There were still plenty of ranchhouses standing, though no sign of a rancher in a gray flannel suit. In some of the picturesquely modern white houses, with their light lines and heavy mortgages, the glass side walls remained unshattered, but there was no sign of happy, busy suburban life within—the television sets were dead.

Now he found his progress impeded by an increasing litter. Apparently a blast had swept through this area; his way was blocked by a clutter of the miscellaneous debris of Exurbia.

HE WADED through or stepped around:

Boxes of Kleenex, artificial shrunken heads which had once dangled in the windows of station-wagons, crumpled shopping-lists and scribbled

notices of appointments with psychiatrists.

He stepped on an Ivy League cap, nearly tripped over a twisted barbecue grille, got his feet tangled in the straps of foam-rubber falsies. The gutters were choked with the glut from a bombed-out drugstore; bobbie-pins, nylon bobby-socks, a spate of pocket-books, a carton of tranquilizers, a mass of suntan lotion, suppositories, deodorants, and a big cardboard cutout of Harry Belafonte obscured by a spilled can of hot fudge.

He shuffled on, through a welter of women's electric shavers, Book-of-the-Month-Club bonus selections, Presley records, false teeth, and treatises on Existentialism. Now he was actually approaching the city proper. Signs of devastation multiplied. Trudging past the campus of the university he noted, with a start of horror, that the huge football stadium was no more. Nestled next to it was the tiny Fine Arts building, and at first he thought that it too had been razed. Upon closer inspection, however, he realized it was untouched, save for the natural evidence of neglect and decay.

He found it difficult to maintain a regular course,

now, for the streets were choked with wrecked vehicles and the sidewalks often blocked by beams or the entire toppled fronts of buildings. Whole structures had been ripped apart, and here and there were freakish variations where a roof had fallen in or a single room smashed to expose its contents. Apparently the blow had come instantly, and without forewarning, for there were few bodies on the streets and those he glimpsed inside the opened buildings gave indication that death had found them in the midst of their natural occupations.

Here, in a gutted basement, a fat man sprawled over the table of his home workshop, his sightless eyes fixed upon the familiar calendar exhibiting entirely the charms of Marilyn Monroe. Two flights above him, through the empty frame of a bathroom window, one could see his wife, dead in the tub, her hand still clutching a movie magazine with a Rock Hudson portrait on the cover. And up in the attic, open to the sky, two young lovers stretched on a brass bed, locked naked in headless ecstasy.

He turned away, and as his progress continued he deliberately avoided looking at the bodies. But he could not avoid

seeing them now, and with familiarity the revulsion softened to the merest twinge. It then gave way to curiosity.

Passing a school playground he was pleased to see that the end had come without grotesque or unnatural violence. Probably a wave of paralyzing gas had swept through this area. Most of the figures were frozen upright in normal postures. Here were all of the aspects of ordinary childhood—the big kid punching the little kid, both leaning up against a fence where the blast had found them; a group of six youngsters in uniform black leather jackets piled upon the body of a child wearing a white leather jacket.

Beyond the playground loomed the center of the city. From a distance the mass of shattered masonry looked like a crazy garden-patch turned by a mad plowman. Here and there were tiny blossoms of flame sprouting forth from the interstices of huge clods, and at intervals he could see lopped, stemlike formations, the lower stories of skyscrapers from which the tops had been sheared by the swish of a thermonuclear scythe.

He hesitated, wondering if it was practical to venture into this weird welter. Then

he caught sight of the hillside beyond, and of the imposing structure which was the new Federal Building. It stood there, somehow miraculously untouched by the blast, and in the haze he could see the flag still fluttering from its roof. There would be life here, and he knew he would not be content until he reached it.

But long before he attained his objective, he found other evidences of continued existence. Moving delicately and deliberately through the debris, he became aware that he was not entirely alone here in the central chaos.

Wherever the flames flared and flickered, there were furtive figures moving against the fire. To his horror, he realized that they were actually kindling the blazes; burning away barricades that could not otherwise be removed, as they entered shops and stores to loot. Some of the scavengers were silent and ashamed, others were boisterous and drunken; all were doomed.

It was this knowledge which kept him from interfering. Let them plunder and pilfer at will, let them quarrel over the spoils in the shattered streets; in a few hours or a few days, radiation and

fallout would take inevitable toll.

NO ONE interfered with his passage; perhaps the helmet and protective garment resembled an official uniform. He went his way unhindered and saw:

A barefooted man wearing a mink coat, dashing through the door of a cocktail lounge and passing bottles out to a bucket-brigade of four small children——

An old woman standing in a bombed-out bank vault, sweeping stacks of bills into the street with her broom. Over in one corner lay the body of a white-haired man, his futile arms outstretched to embrace a heap of coins. Impatiently, the old woman nudged him with her broom. His head lolled, and a silver dollar popped out of his open mouth——

A soldier and a woman wearing the armband of the Red Cross, carrying a stretcher to the blocked entrance of a partially-razed church. Unable to enter, they bore the stretcher around to the side, and the soldier kicked in one of the stained-glass windows——

An artist's basement studio, open to the sky; its walls still intact and covered with

abstract paintings. In the center of the room stood the easel, but the artist was gone. What was left of him was smeared across the canvas in a dripping mass, as though the artist had finally succeeded in putting something of himself into his picture——

A welter of glassware that had once been a chemical laboratory, and in the center of it a smocked figure slumped over a microscope. On the slide was a single cell which the scientist had been intently observing when the world crashed about his ears——

A woman with the face of a *Vogue* model, spread-eagled in the street. Apparently she had been struck down while answering the call of duty, for one slim, aristocratic hand still gripped the strap of her hatbox. Otherwise, due to some prank of explosion, the blast had stripped her quite naked; she lay there with all her expensive loveliness exposed, and a pigeon nested in her golden pelvis——

A thin man, emerging from a pawnshop and carrying an enormous tuba. He disappeared momentarily into a meat market nextdoor, then came out again, the bell of his tuba stuffed with sausages——

A broadcasting studio, com-

pletely demolished, its once immaculate sound stage littered with the crumpled cartons of fifteen different varieties of America's Favorite Cigarette and the broken bottles of twenty brands of America's Favorite Beer. Protruding from the wreckage was the head of America's Favorite Quizmaster, eyes staring glassily at a sealed booth in the corner which now served as the coffin for a nine-year-old boy who had known the batting-averages of every team in the American and National Leagues since 1882——

A wild-eyed woman sitting in the street, crying and crooning over a kitten cradled in her arms——

A broker caught at his desk, his body mummified in coils of ticker-tape——

A motor-bus, smashed into a brick wall; its passengers still jamming the aisles; standees clutching straps even in *rigor mortis*——

The hindquarters of a stone lion before what had once been the Public Library; before it, on the steps, the corpse of an elderly lady whose shopping-bag had spewed its contents over the street—two murder-mysteries, a rental copy of *Peyton*

Place, and the latest issue of the *Reader's Digest*——

A small boy wearing a cowboy hat, who levelled a toy pistol at his little sister and shouted, "Bang! You're dead!"

(She was.)

He walked slowly now, his pace impeded by obstacles both physical and of the spirit. He approached the building on the hillside by a circuitous route; avoiding repugnance, overcoming morbid curiosity, shunning pity, recoiling from horror, surmounting shock.

He knew there were others about him here in the city's core, some bent on acts of mercy, some on heroic rescue. But he ignored them all, for they were dead. Mercy had no meaning in this mist, and there was no rescue from radiation. Some of those who passed called out to him, but he went his way unheeding, knowing their words were mere death-rattles.

But suddenly, as he climbed the hillside, he was crying. The salty warmth ran down his cheeks and blurred the inner surface of his helmet so that he no longer saw anything clearly. And it was thus he emerged from the inner circle; the inner circle

of the city, the inner circle of Dante's hell.

His tears ceased to flow and his vision cleared. Ahead of him was the proud outline of the Federal Building, shining and intact—or almost so.

AS HE neared the imposing steps and gazed up at the façade, he noted that there were a few hints of crumbling and corrosion on the surface of the structure. The freakish blast had done outright damage only to the sculptured figures surmounting the great arched doorway; the symbolic statuary had been partially shattered so that the frontal surface had fallen away. He blinked at the empty outlines of the three figures; somehow he never had realized that Faith, Hope and Charity were hollow.

Then he walked inside the building. There were tired soldiers guarding the doorway, but they made no move to stop him, probably because he wore a protective garment even more intricate and impressive than their own.

Inside the structure a small army of low clerks and high brass moved antlike in the corridors; marching grim-faced up and down the stairs. There were no elevators, of course—they'd ceased func-

tioning when the electricity gave out. But he could climb.

He wanted to climb now, for that was why he had come here. He wanted to gaze out over the city. In his gray insulation he resembled an automaton, and like an automaton he plodded stiffly up the stairways until he reached the topmost floor.

But there were no windows here, only walled-in offices. He walked down a long corridor until he came to the very end. Here, a single large cubicle glowed with gray light from the glass wall beyond.

A man sat at a desk, jiggling the receiver of a field telephone and cursing softly. He glanced curiously at the intruder, noted the insulating uniform, and returned to his abuse of the instrument in his hand.

So it was possible to walk over to the big window and look down.

It was possible to see the city, or the crater where the city had been.

Night was mingling with the haze on the horizon, but there was no darkness. The little incendiary blazes had been spreading, apparently, as the wind moved in, and now he gazed down upon a growing sea of flame. The crum-

bling spires and gutted structures were drowning in red waves. As he watched, the tears came again, but he knew there would not be enough tears to put the fires out.

So he turned back to the man at the desk, noting for the first time that he wore one of the very special uniforms reserved for generals.

This must be the commander, then. Yes, he was certain of it now, because the floor around the desk was littered with scraps of paper. Maybe they were obsolete maps, maybe they were obsolete plans, maybe they were obsolete treaties. It didn't matter now.

There was another map on the wall behind the desk, and this one mattered very much. It was studded with black and red pins, and it took but a moment to decipher their meaning. The red pins signified destruction, for there was one affixed to the name of this city. And there was one for New York, one for Chicago,

Detroit, Los Angeles—every important center had been pierced.

He looked at the general, and finally the words came.

"It must be awful," he said.

"Yes, awful," the general echoed.

"Millions upon millions dead."

"Dead."

"The cities destroyed, the air polluted, and no escape. No escape anywhere in the world."

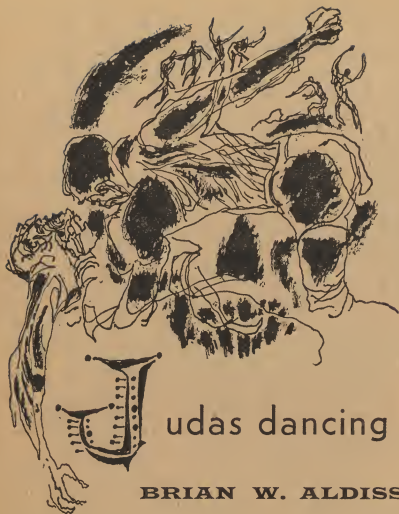
"No escape."

He turned away and stared out the window once more, stared down at Inferno. Thinking, *this is what it has come to, this is the way the world ends.*

He glanced at the general again, and then sighed. "To think of our being beaten," he whispered.

The red glare mounted, and in its light he saw the general's face, gleeful and exultant.

"What do you mean, man?" the general said proudly, the flames rising. "We won!"



udas dancing

BRIAN W. ALDISS

IT WAS not a fair trial. You understand I was not inclined to listen properly, but it was not a fair trial. It had a mistrustful and fur-

tive haste about it. Judge, counsel and jury all took care to be as brief and explicit as possible. I said nothing, but I knew why: everyone wanted

to get back to the dances.

So it was not very long before the judge stood up and pronounced sentence:

"Alexander Abel Crowe, this court finds you guilty of murdering Parowen Scryban for the second time."

I could have laughed out loud. I nearly did.

He went on: "You are therefore condemned to suffer death by strangulation for the second time, which sentence will be carried out within the next week."

Round the court ran a murmur of excitement.

In a way, even I felt satisfied. It had been an unusual case: few are the people who care to risk facing death a second time; the first time you die makes the prospect worse, not better. For just a minute, the court was still, then it cleared with almost indecent haste. In a little while, only I was left there.

I, Alex Abel Crowe—or approximately he—came carefully down out of the prisoner's box and limped the length of the dusty room to the door. As I went, I looked at my hands. They weren't trembling.

Nobody bothered to keep a check on me. They knew they could pick me up whenever they were ready to execute

sentence. I was unmistakable, and I had nowhere to go. I was the man with the club foot who could not dance; nobody could mistake me for anyone else. Only I could do that.

Outside in the dark sunlight, that wonderful woman stood waiting for me with her husband, waiting on the court steps. The sight of her began to bring back life and hurt to my veins. I raised my hand to her as my custom was.

"We've come to take you home, Alex," Husband said, stepping towards me.

"I haven't got a home," I said, addressing her.

"I meant *our* home," he informed me.

"Elucidation accepted," I said. "Take me away, take me away, take me away, Charlemagne. And let me sleep."

"You need a sleep after all you have been through," he said. Why, he sounded nearly sympathetic.

Sometimes I called him Charlemagne, sometimes just Charley. Or Cheeps, or Jags, or Jaggers, or anything, as the mood took me. He seemed to forgive me. Perhaps he even liked it—I don't know. Personal magnetism takes you a long way; it has taken me so far I don't even have to remember names.

THEY stopped a passing taxi and we all climbed in. It was a tumbriel, they tell me. You know, French? Circa seventeen-eighty something. Husband sat one side, Wife the other, each holding one of my arms, as if they thought I should get violent. I let them do it, although the idea amused me.

"Hallo, friends!" I said ironically. Sometimes I called them "parents," or "disciples," or sometimes "patients." Anything.

The wonderful woman was crying slightly.

"Look at her!" I said to Husband. "She's lovely when she cries, that I swear. I could have married her, you know, if I had not been dedicated. Tell him, you wonderful creature, tell him how I turned you down!"

Through her sobbing, she said, "Alex said he had more important things to do than sex."

"So you've got to thank me for Perdita!" I told him. "It was a big sacrifice, but I'm happy to see you happy." Often now I called her Perdita. It seemed to fit her. He laughed at what I had said, and then we were all laughing. Yes, it was good to be alive; I knew I made them feel good to be alive. They were loyal. I had

to give them something—I had no gold and silver.

The tumbriel stopped outside Charley's place—the husband residence, I'd better say. Oh, the things I've called that place! Someone should have recorded them all. It was one of those inverted beehive houses: just room for a door and an elevator on the ground floor, but the fifth floor could hold a ballroom. Topply, topply. Up we went to the fifth. There was no sixth floor; had there been, I should have gone up there, the way I felt. I asked for it anyhow, just to see the wonderful woman brighten up. She liked me to joke, even when I wasn't in a joking mood. I could tell she still loved me so much it hurt her.

"Now for a miracle, ye pampered jades," I said, stepping forth, clumping into the living room.

I seized an empty vase from a low shelf and spat into it. Ah, the old cunning was still there! It filled at once with wine, sweet and bloody-looking. I sipped and found it good.

"Go on and taste it, Perdy!" I told her.

Wonderful w. turned her head sadly away. She would not touch that vase. I could have eaten every single strand

of hair on her head, but she seemed unable to see the wine. I really believe she could not see that wine.

"Please don't go through all that again, Alex," she implored me wearily. Little faith, you see—the old, old story. (Remind me to tell you a new one I heard the other day.) I put my behind on one chair and my bad foot on another and sulked.

They came and stood by me . . . not too close.

"Come nearer," I coaxed, looking up under my eyebrows and pretending to growl at them. "I won't hurt you. I only murder Parowen Scryban, remember?"

"We've got to talk to you about that," Husband said desperately. I thought he looked as if he had aged.

"I think you look as if you have aged, Perdita," I said. Often I called him Perdita, too; why, man, they sometimes looked so worried you couldn't tell them apart.

"I cannot live forever, Alex," he replied. "Now try and concentrate about this killing, will you?"

I waved a hand and tried to belch. At times I can belch like a sinking ship.

"We do all we can to help you, Alex," he said. I heard him although my eyes were

shut; can *you* do that? "But we can only keep you out of trouble if you co-operate. It's the dancing that does it; nothing else betrays you like dancing. You've got to promise you'll stay away from it. In fact, we want you to promise that you'll let us restrain you. To keep you away from the dancing. Something about that dancing. . . ."

He was going on and on, and I could still hear him. But other things were happening. That word "dancing" got in the way of all his other words. It started a sort of flutter under my eyelids. I crept my hand out and took the wonderful woman's hand, so soft and lovely, and listened to that word "dancing" dancing. It brought its own rhythm, bouncing about like an eyeball inside my head. The rhythm grew louder. He was shouting.

I sat up suddenly, opening my eyes.

W. woman was on the floor, very pale.

"You squeezed too hard, boy," she whispered.

I COULD see that her little hand was the only red thing she had.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I really wonder you two don't throw me out for good!" I

couldn't help it, I just started laughing. I like laughing. I can laugh even when nothing's funny. Even when I saw their faces, I still kept laughing like mad.

"Stop it!" Husband said. For a moment he looked as if he would have hit me. But I was laughing so much I did not recognize him. It must have done them good to see me enjoying myself; they both needed a fillip, I could tell.

"If you stop laughing, I'll take you down to the club," he said, greasily bribing.

I stopped. I always know when to stop. With all humility, that is a great natural gift.

"The club's the place for me," I said. "I've already got a club foot—I'm half way there!"

I stood up.

"Lead on, my loyal supporters, my liege lords," I ordered.

"You and I will go alone, Alex," Husband said. "The wonderful woman will stay here. She really ought to go to bed."

"What's in it for her?" I joked. Then I followed him to the elevator. He knows I don't like staying in any one place for long.

When I got to the club, I knew, I would want to be somewhere else. That's the

worst of having a mission: it makes you terribly restless. Sometimes I am so restless I could die. Ordinary people just don't know what the word means. I could have married her if I had been ordinary. They call it destiny.

But the club was good.

We walked there. I limped there. I made sure I limped badly.

The club had a timescreen. That, I must admit, was my only interest in the club. I don't care for women. Or men. Not living women or men. I only enjoy them when they are back in time.

This night—I nearly said "this particular night," but there was nothing particularly particular about it—the timescreen had only been tuned roughly three centuries back into the past. At least, I guessed it was twenty-first century stuff by the women's dresses and a shot of a power station. A large crowd of people were looking in as Perdita Caesar and I entered, so I started to pretend he had never seen one of the wall screens before.

"The tele-eyes which are projected back over history consume a fabulous amount of power every second," I told him loudly, in a voice which suggested I had swal-

lowed a poker. "It makes them very expensive. It means private citizens cannot afford screens and tele-eyes, just as once they could not afford their own private cinemas. This club is fortunately very rich. Its members sleep in gold leaf at nights."

Several people were glancing round at me already. Caesar was shaking his head and rolling his eyes.

"The tele-eyes cannot get a picture further than twenty-seven centuries back," I told him, "owing to the limitations of science. Science, as you know, is a system for taking away with one hand while giving with the other."

He could not answer cleverly. I went on: "It has also proved impossible, due to the aforesaid limitations, to send human beings further back in time than one week. And that costs so much that only governments can do it. As you may have heard, nothing can be sent ahead into time—there's no future in it!"

I had to laugh at that. It was funny, and quite spontaneous.

Many people were calling out to me, and Caesar Borgia was dragging at my arm, trying to make me be quiet.

"I wouldn't spoil anyone's fun!" I shouted. "You lot get

on with your watching; I'll get on with my speech."

But I did not want to talk to a lot of feather-bedders like them. So I sat down without saying another word, Boy Borgia collapsing beside me with a sigh of relief. Suddenly I felt very, very sad. Life just is not what it was; once on a time, I could have married this husband's wife.

"Physically, you can go back one week," I whispered, "optically, twenty-seven centuries. It's very sad."

It was very sad. The people on the screen were also sad. They lived in the Entertainment Era, and appeared to be getting little pleasure from it. I tried to weep for them but failed, because at the moment they seemed just animated history. I saw them as period pieces, stuck there a couple of generations before reading and writing had died out altogether and the fetters of literacy fell forever from the world. Little any of them cared for the patterns of history.

"I've had an idea I want to tell you about, Cheezer," I said. It was a good idea.

"Can't it wait?" he asked. "I'd like to see this scan. It's all about the European Alle-giance."

"I must tell you before I forget."

"Come on," he said resignedly, getting up.

"You are too loyal to me," I complained. "You spoil me. I'll speak to St. Peter about it."

AS MEEK as you like, I followed him into an ante-room. He drew himself a drink from an automatic man in one corner. He was trembling. I did not tremble, although at the back of my mind lurked many things to tremble about.

"Go on then, say whatever in hell you want to say," he told me, shading his eyes with his hand. I have seen him use that trick before; he did it after I killed Parowen Scryban the first time, I remember. There's nothing wrong with my memory, except in patches.

"I had this idea," I said, trying to recall it. "This idea—oh, yes. History. I got the idea looking at those twenty-first century people. Mythology is the key to everything, isn't it? I mean, a man builds his life on a set of myths, doesn't he? Well, in our world, the so-called Western world, those accepted myths were religious until about mid-nineteenth century. By

then, a majority of Europeans were literate, or within reach of it, and for a couple of centuries the myths became literary ones: tragedy was no longer the difference between grace and nature but between art and reality."

Julius had dropped his hand. He was interested. I could see he wondered what was coming next. I hardly knew myself.

"Then mechanical aids—television, computers, scanners of every type—abolished literacy," I said. "Into the vacuum came the timescreens. Our mythologies are now historical: tragedy has become simply a failure to see the future."

I beamed at him and bowed, not letting him know I was beyond tragedy. He just sat there. He said nothing. Sometimes such terrible boredom descends on me that I can hardly fight against it.

"Is my reasoning sound?" I asked. (Two women looked into the room, saw me, and left again hurriedly. They must have sensed I did not want them, otherwise they would have come to me; I am young and handsome—I am not thirty-three yet.)

"You could always reason well," Marcus Aurelius Marconi said, "but it just never

leads anywhere. God, I'm so tired."

"This bit of reasoning leads somewhere. I beg you to believe it, Holy Roman," I said, flopping on my knees before him. "It's the state philosophy I've really been telling you about. That's why although they keep the death penalty for serious crimes—like murdering a bastard called Parowen Scryban—they go back in time the next day and call off the execution. They believe you should die for your crime, you see? But more deeply they believe every man should face his true future. They've—we've all seen too many premature deaths on the timescreens. Romans, Normans, Celts, Goths, English, Israelis. Every race. Individuals—all dying too soon, failing to fulfill——"

Oh, I admit it, I was crying on his knees by then, although bravely disguising it by barking like a dog: a Great Dane. Hamlet. Not in our stars but in our selves. (I've watched W. S. write that bit.)

I was crying at last to think the police would come without fail within the next week to snuff me out, and then resurrect me again, according to my sentence. I was remembering what it was like last

time. They took so long about it.

They took so long. Though I struggled, I could not move; those police know how to hold a man. My windpipe was blocked, as sentence of court demanded.

And then, it seemed, the boxes sailed in. Starting with small ones, they grew bigger. They were black boxes, all of them. Faster they came, and faster, inside me and out. I'm telling you how it felt, my God! And they blocked the whole, whole universe, black on red. With my lungs really crammed tight with boxes, out of the world I went. Dead!

Into limbo I went.

I don't say nothing happened, but I could not grasp what was happening there, and I was unable to participate. Then I was alive again.

It was abruptly the day before the strangulation once more, and the government agent had come back in time and rescued me, so that from one point of view I was not strangled. *But* I still remembered it happening, and the boxes, and limbo. Don't talk to me about paradoxes. The government expended several billion megavolts sending that man back for me, and those megavolts account for all

paradoxes. I was dead and then alive again.

Now I had to undergo it all once more. No wonder there was little crime nowadays: the threat of that horrible experience held many a likely criminal back. But I *had* to kill Parowen Scryban; just so long as they went back and resurrected him after I had finished with him, I had to go and do it again. Call it a moral obligation. No one understands. It is as if I were living in a world of my own.

"Get up, get up! You're biting my ankles."

Where had I heard that voice before? At last I could no longer ignore it. Whenever I try to think, voices interrupt. I stopped chewing whatever I was chewing, unblocked my eyes and sat up. This was just a room; I had been in rooms before. A man was standing over me; I did not recognize him. He was just a man.

"You look as if you have aged," I told him.

"I can't live forever, thank God," he said. "Now get up and let's get you home. You're going to bed."

"What home?" I asked. "What bed? Who in the gentle name of anyone may you be?"

He looked sick.

"Just call me Adam," he said sickly.

I recognized him then and went with him. We had been in some sort of a club; he never told me why. I still don't know why we went to that club.

THE house he took me to was shaped like a beehive upside-down, and I walked there like a drunk. A club-footed drunk.

This wonderful stranger took me up in an elevator to a soft bed. He undressed me and put me in that soft bed as gently as if I had been his son. I am really impressed by the kindness strangers show me; personal magnetism, I suppose.

For as long as I could after he had left me, I lay in the bed in the inverted beehive. Then the darkness grew thick and sticky, and I could imagine all the fat, furry bodies, chitinously winged, of the bees on the ceiling. A minute more and I should fall head first into them. Stubbornly, I fought to sweat it out, but a man can only stand so much.

On hands and knees I crawled out of bed and out of the room. Quickly, softly, I clicked the door shut behind me; not a bee escaped.

People were talking in a

lighted room along the corridor. I crawled to the doorway, looking and listening. The wonderful stranger talked to the wonderful woman; she was in night attire (pronounced "nigh ta-ta") with a hand bandaged.

She was saying: "You will have to see the authorities in the morning and petition them."

He was saying: "It'll do no good. I can't get the law changed. You know that. It's hopeless."

I merely listened.

Sinking onto the bed, he buried his face in his hands, finally looking up to say, "The law insists on personal responsibility. We've got to take care of Alex. It's a reflection of the time we live in; owing to the timescreens we've got—whether we like it or not—historical perspectives. We can see that the whole folly of the past was due to failures in individual liability. Our laws are naturally framed to correct that, which they do—it just happens to be tough on us."

He sighed and said, "The sad thing is, even Alex realizes that. He talked quite sensibly to me at the club about not evading the future."

"It hurts me most when he

talks sensibly," the wonderful double-you said. "It makes you realize he is still capable of suffering."

He took her bandaged hand, almost as if they had a pain they hoped to alleviate by sharing it between them.

"I'll go and see the authorities in the morning," he promised, "and ask them to let the execution be final—no reprieve afterwards."

Even that did not seem to satisfy her.

Perhaps, like me, she could not tell what either of them were talking about. She shook her head miserably from side to side.

"If only it hadn't been for his club foot," she said. "If only it hadn't been for that, he could have danced the sickness out of himself."

Her face was growing more and more screwed up.

It was enough. More.

"Laugh and grow fat," I suggested. I croaked because my throat was dry. My glands are always like bullets. It reminded me of a frog, so I hopped spontaneously into the room. They did not move; I sat on the bed with them.

"All together again," I said. They did not move.

"Go back to bed, Alex," she of the wonderfulness said in a low voice.

They were looking at me; goodness knows what they wanted me to say or do. I stayed where I was. A little green clock on a green shelf said nine o'clock.

"Oh, holy heavens!" the double-you said. "What does the future hold!"

"Double chins for you, double-yous for me," I joked. That green clock said a minute past nine. I felt as if its little hand were slowly, slowly disembowelling me.

If I waited long enough, I knew I should think of something. They talked to me while I thought and waited; what good they imagined they were doing is beyond me, but I would not harm them. They mean well. They're the best people in the world. That doesn't mean to say I have to listen to them.

The thought about the clock arrived. Divine revelation.

"The dancing will be on now," I said, standing up like a jackknife.

"No!" Husband said.

"No!" Perdita said.

"You look as if you have aged," I told them. That is my favorite line in all speech.

I RAN out of the room, slamming the door behind me, ran step-club-step-club down the passage and hurled

myself into the elevator. With infinitesimal delay, I chose the right button and sank to ground level. There, I wedged the lattice door open with a chair; that put the elevator out of action.

People in the street took no notice of me. The fools just did not realize who I was. Nobody spoke to me as I hurried along, so of course I replied in kind.

Thus I came to the dance area.

Every community has its dance area. Think of all that drama, gladiatorial contests, reading, and sport have ever meant in the past; now they are all merged into dance, inevitably, for only by dance—our kind of dance—can history be interpreted. And interpretation of history is our being, because through the timescreens we see that history is life. It lives round us, so we dance it. Unless we have club feet.

Many dances were in progress among the thirty permanent sets. The sets were only casually separated from each other, so that spectators or dancers, going from one to another, might get the sense of everything happening at once, which is the sense the timescreens give you.

That is what I savagely

love about history. It is not past: it is always going on. Cleopatra lies forever in the sweaty arms of Anthony, Socrates continually gulps his hemlock down. You just have to be watching the right screen or the right dance.

Most of the dancers were amateurs—although the term means little where everyone dances out their roles whenever possible. I stood among a crowd, watching. The bright movements have a dizzying effect; they excite me. To one side of me, Marco Polo sweeps exultantly through Cathay to Kubla Khan. Ahead, four children who represent the satellites of Jupiter, glide out to meet the sombre figure of Galileo Galilei. To the other side, the Persian poet Firdausi leaves for exile in Bagdad. Further still, I catch a glimpse of Heyerdahl turning towards the tide.

And if I cross my eyes, raft, telescope, pagoda, palm all mingle. That is meaning! If I could only dance it!

I cannot stay still. Here is my restlessness again, my only companion. I move, eyes unfocused. I pass round the sets or across them, mingling stiff-legged among the dancers. Something compels me, something I cannot remem-

ber. Now I cannot even remember who I am. I've gone beyond mere identity.

Everywhere the dancing is faster, matching my heart. I would not harm anyone, except one person who harmed me eternally. It is he I must find. Why do they dance so fast? The movements drive me like whips.

Now I run into a mirror. It stands on a crowded set. I fight with the creature imprisoned in it, thinking it real. Then I understand that it is only a mirror. Shaking my head, I clear the blood from behind my eyes and regard myself. Yes, that is unmistakably me. And I remember who I am meant to be.

I first found who I was meant to be as a child, when I saw one of the greatest dramas of all. There it was, captured by the timescreens! The soldiers and centurions came and a bragging multitude. The sky grew dark as they banged three crosses into the ground. And when I saw the Man they nailed upon the central cross, I knew I had His face.

Here it is now, that same sublime face, looking at me in pity and pain out of the glass. Nobody believes me; I no longer tell them who I think I am. But one thing I know I

have to do. I have to do *it*.

So now I run again clump-trot-clump-trot, knowing just what to look for. All these great sets, pillars and panels of concrete and plastic, I run round them all, looking.

And here it is. Professionals dance out this drama, my drama, so difficult and intricate and sad. Pilate in dove gray, Mary Magdalene moves in green. Hosts of dancers fringe them, representing the crowd who did not care. I care! My eyes burn among them, seeking. Then I have the man I want.

He is just leaving the set, to rest out of sight until the cue for his last dance. I follow him, keeping behind cover like a crab in a thicket.

Yes! He looks just like me! He is my living image, and consequently bears That face. Yet it is now overlaid with make-up, pink and solid, so that when he comes out of the bright lights he looks like a corpse.

I am near enough to see the thick muck on his skin, with its runnels and wrinkles caused by sweat and movement. Underneath it all, the true face is clear enough to me, although the make-up plastered on it represents Judas.

To have That face and to

play Judas! It is the most terrible of all wickedness. But this is Parowen Scryban, whom I have twice murdered for this very blasphemy. It is some consolation to know that although the government slipped back in time and saved him afterwards, he must still remember those good deaths. Now I must kill him again.

As he turns into a rest room, I have him. Ah, my fingers slip into that slippery pink stuff, but underneath the skin is firm. He is small, slender, tired with the strain of dancing. He falls forward with me on his back.

I kill him now, although in a few hours they will come back and rescue him and it will all not have happened. Never mind the shouting: squeeze. Squeeze, dear God!

WHEN blows fall on my head from behind, it makes no difference. Scryban should be dead by now, the traitor. I roll off him and let many hands tie me into a strait jacket.

Many lights are in my eyes. Many voices are talking. I just lie there, thinking I recognize two of the voices, one a man's, one a woman's.

The man says, "Yes, Inspector, I *know* that under

law parents are responsible for their own children. We look after Alex as far as we can, but he's mad. He's a throwback! I—God, Inspector, I *hate* the creature."

"You mustn't say that!" the woman cries. "Whatever he does, he's our son."

They sound too shrill to be true. I cannot think what they make such a fuss about. So I open my eyes and look at them. She is a wonderful woman but I recognize neither her nor the man; they just do not interest me. Scryban I do recognize.

He is standing rubbing his throat. He looks a real mess with his two faces all mixed in together like a Picasso. Because he is breathing, I know they have come back and saved him again. No matter: he will remember.

The man they call Inspector (and who, I ask, would want a name like that?) goes over to speak to Scryban.

"Your father tells me you are actually this madman's brother," he says to Scryban. Judas hangs his head, though he continues to massage his neck.

"Yes," he says. He is as quiet as the woman was shrill; strange how folks vary. "Alex and I are twin brothers. I

changed my name years ago—the publicity, you know... harmful to my professional career. . . ."

How terribly tired and bored I feel.

Who is whose brother, I ask myself, who mothers whom? I'm lucky: I own no relations. These people look sad company. The saddest in the universe.

"I think you all look as if you have aged!" I shout suddenly.

That makes the Inspector come and stand over me, which I dislike. He has knees halfway up his legs. I manage to resemble one of the tritons on one of Benvenuto Cellini's salt cellars, and so he turns away at last to speak to Husband.

"All right," he says. "I can see this is just one of those things nobody can be responsible for. I'll arrange for the reprieve to be countermanded. This time, when the devil is dead he stays dead."

Husband embraces Scryban. Wonderful woman begins to cry. Traitors all! I start to laugh, making it so harsh and loud and horrible it frightens even me.

What none of them understand is this: on the third time I shall rise again. And, oh, to dance!

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the apprentice wobbler

A Novelette

POUL ANDERSON

THE moving men were cleaning out an office on the fifteenth story of the building across the street.

As Holloway and Damon watched, a safe came floating

through the window. It bobbed a little in the breeze, clanking lightly against the filing cabinets which were already there. A couple of heavy desks and some assort-

the apprentice wobbler

ed furniture drifted out after the safe.

"That must be about it," said Damon uneasily.

"Yeah." Holloway shook a cigarette from its pack and stuck it in his mouth.

A man jumped from the window. He was in ordinary work clothes, with a Wojcek machine like a suitcase in his hand. He soared to one of the swivel chairs hovering in the sky, sat down, and made himself comfortable with the machine on his lap.

Then the whole convoy got into motion and flew out of sight beyond the skyscrapers.

Damon looked at the crowds below, most of them going casually about their business—Wojcek was getting to be an old story—and swore in a tired voice. "You'd think the cops would at least rope off the area," he said. "Suppose that damn gadget failed? People would get killed."

"Wojcek hasn't failed yet," said Holloway. "They claim they *can't* have accidents."

"They claim! They claim!" Damon spun on his heel and walked over to his desk and sat down behind it. He was a big man, with soft face and hard eyes, correctly outfitted in the green suit and sincere tie currently prescribed for executives. He regarded the

machine before him with a bitter gaze. It was of the same oblong shape as the one he had just seen in use, with a handle, a neat crackle finish, and a bewildering array of meters and dials; but it had come out of his company's own laboratories. Nobody who owned a Wojcek would sell it for any price, and stolen ones disappeared, went back to their owners in some unknown fashion.

"Sit down, Dan," he said. "We've got to run through this again. Maybe then we can get the picture."

DANIEL HOLLOWAY jackknifed his gaunt frame into a chair, remembered that he was supposed to look alert, and used the edge of the seat. His long face did not bend itself easily into an expression of deferential eagerness, but he tried manfully.

"Okay, chief," he said. "Fire when ready."

"You got no results whatsoever out of this thing?" Damon gestured at the machine. Its meters gazed blandly back at him.

"None, chief."

"Are you sure it's a true copy?"

"Well, the patent is on file, you know. We built it exactly

according to specifications." Holloway scowled and ran a hand through his coarse black hair. "I could have told you from the blueprints, though, that we wouldn't learn anything. It's just a lot of tubes, capacitors, and whatnot, powered by a six-volt dry cell battery. The current goes round and round, and it doesn't produce anything except a little heat."

"But damn it, boy, the thing works for the Wojcek crews!" said Damon.

"Uh-huh. And you tell me where a six-volt battery finds the power to lift a safe weighing a couple of tons." Holloway realized that his cigarette was still unlighted, and fumbled after a match. "There were no ropes attached to that furniture, no nothing. . . . I not only can't figure out where the energy comes from, I can't understand how it's applied. I've watched their crews at work, you know, using every instrument I could think of to try and find out. Nothing registered, except the slight local temperature drop reported in all the journals."

The vice president in charge of research and development nailed the engineer with a stiff eye. "I don't get any nourishment out of this,

boy," he said. "Have you read *all* the technical papers?"

"Oh, yes," said Holloway bleakly. "Articles by a dozen different men in twenty different journals. Including Wojcek's own reports. He describes how you can move matter, gives measurements of the selectivity and . . . well, all the data are there. And the physicists are going quietly insane trying to find a theory which accounts for it."

"Still," mused Damon, "it's funny that the only people who can make those blasted things work are those Wojcek has trained himself."

"But that includes men from the Bureau of Standards," pointed out Holloway. "It's no fake. After all, chief, theoretically anyone can do a successful appendectomy from a description in a book, but in practice it usually takes a skilled surgeon. The mere fact that special training is required proves nothing. Neither does the fact that nobody knows the *why* of the Wojcek Effect. It's like, oh, X-rays, which were used for quite a while before anybody really understood what generated them. The point is, Wojcek has proved to the government's satisfaction that his machines are safe in the

hands of a skilled operator. In fact, they're safer than any other gadget, because an unskilled man can't make them work at all."

"I know," said Damon in a moody voice. "Our legal department tried for two years to get injunctions. And now the louse is—— Dan, he'll destroy the economy! His people move furniture, cargo, anything, anywhere, for half price and no breakage. He generates his own atomic energy. Auto stocks are nose-diving, because everybody figures in a few years they'll have Wojcek machines too, and fly around without the trouble and expense of a car. He's talking about crashproof airplanes that don't need fuel! Lucky thing, boy, we've got friends in the CAA and he hasn't gotten a permit yet—but it's coming. Gas, oil, autos, uranium, a hundred essential businesses are ready to go bust."

"I know," said Holloway. The fear of being laid off was haggard in him. He was only an engineer in the corporation's research department, no executive status whatsoever. He had hopes of promotion, but——

"The only thing that's saved us so far is, it takes time to train his operators,"

said Damon. "Only a few thousand of 'em to date. But it'll snowball if we don't stop it."

"I don't see how we can," said Holloway uneasily. He added a hasty: "Chief."

"Oh, we don't want to *stop* it," Damon smiled, exuding sincerity. "After all, boy, our great American free enterprise economy . . . progress . . . rising standard of living. Sure. But you got to see the big picture, Dan. Readjustment. We can't be hasty. We have a responsibility to our shareholders." Holloway waited for him to describe the widows and orphans, but was spared that much. "Let's put it this way, man to man. We want a piece of this."

"Well——"

"If we find out how it works, maybe we can do something about it. This Wojcek character. Radical. Something ought to be done. You know what?" Damon leaned forward confidentially. "We've had him traced back. He's no physicist. He was bounced out of the American Psychological Association ten years ago for making fancy claims he couldn't prove. That's right, he started out as an egghead psych professor."

Holloway sucked in a surprised breath.

"So we need you, Dan," said Damon earnestly. "I've had my eye on you for quite a while. Quite a while. You're a bright boy, up and coming. I want you to go enroll in Wojcek's school. Learn all you can. Mostly, learn what this flimflam is and what really makes the gadget work. But if you can pick up anything else—you know. There might be a nice little promotion waiting for you when you get back. We need a new assistant department head."

Holloway sighed. He had been afraid of this.

II

WOJCEK Enterprises maintained its headquarters and school on a hundred acres of Iowa farmland, more to escape the nuisance of city inspections than for fear of accidents. Holloway was met at the Des Moines airport by a stocky, blond young man who introduced himself as Thomas Gerrold. "Got your luggage? I'll drive you out to the place."

"I thought you, uh, flew," said Holloway.

Gerrold laughed. "Well, I could kite you there, but

most of the recruits would find that a bit disconcerting." He picked up one of the bags and led the way out. "I'm a sort of principal at the school, your official wailing wall, besides doing a lot of the instruction. The old man can't be bothered with it, he's all tied up in research." With a startlingly sharp blue glance: "Do you know why Olson cancelled out?"

"His wife is sick," lied Holloway. As a matter of fact, it had taken a substantial bribe; there was a waiting list of thousands. Olson had recommended Holloway to take his place and, rather to everyone's surprise, the switch had been made at once—probably because Wojcek needed men with technical training and most of them were too set in their jobs to apply. A generation which worshipped before the altars of Conforming Security was apt to be short on pioneers.

"Too bad," said Gerrold. "You know, though, we've already had a good deal of luck with our medical program. Maybe in another few years we'll put the doctors out of business."

"Huh?" Holloway stopped dead.

"Sure. Look, if a Wobbly—that's our pet name for the

Wojcek machine—if it's sensitive enough to shift individual nucleons around and get atomic energy out of plain old water, why can't it kill bacteria selectively? Or remove cancers, or shunt calcium right out of your hardening arteries? We're having trouble—biological systems are so much more complicated than even the atomic nucleus—and we're handicapped by having only one or two biologists who can operate the gizmo. But it looks promising."

They emerged in the parking lot. Gerrold stared coldly at the sardine-packed vehicles. "Take us an hour just to get out of town," he snorted, "and it's getting to be as much as your life is worth to venture on a highway. All that petroleum, metal, irreplaceable natural resources, used up—I look forward to seeing the automobile join the buggy in the museums."

Holloway had sometimes cherished similar thoughts, but it shocked him to hear them spoken in the open air. Maybe Wojcek and his gang really were subversive.

Gerrold had cursed his way through the city and was on US 69, bound north between rolling green fields, before he resumed conversation. "Why

did you enroll, Dan?" he asked.

"I was interested," said Holloway.

"Let's see. You were with——"

Holloway named the corporation truthfully enough. His resignation was on file there too, just in case anyone got nosy. "Electronics engineer," he added. "This new field of yours seemed right in my line."

"Wasn't your outfit working on it too?"

HOLLOWAY hesitated, remembered that the Wobly circuits were no secret and that Gerrold was probably not naive, and nodded. "Of course. But we couldn't get anywhere."

"It takes training. We can't just write an operating manual; we have to develop the skills, grind them right into your brain." Gerrold stared ahead of him and added casually: "Ever wondered why we don't take students affiliated with any organization? We did accept those men from the Bureau of Standards—three graduated out of twenty—but that was only to prove we weren't faking and to get the necessary licenses. Otherwise we insist on our pupils being free of all ties."

"Why? Well . . . you don't want competition, I suppose."

"Nonsense! We're not looking for an anti-trust suit. After you graduate, you're free to go where you want. There are already small Wobbly companies springing up all over the world. In time, we hope to see other schools established, independent ones, though an instructor in the technique needs more training than a simple operator. No, Dan, there are two good reasons."

Holloway waited while Gerrold maneuvered profanely past a truck. "Yes?"

"*Imprimis*: I know Steve Wojcek has been called a radical, but actually he's one of the last believers in private enterprise—which a big corporation, subsidized, government-contracted, protected by tariffs and fair trade laws and sheer bigness from all genuine competition, up to its nose in politics, a royal share of its stock owned by labor unions . . . *ain't*. Consider this damn hunk of machinery I'm driving. You know as well as I do it could be made for half the price and twice as efficient—front-wheel drive, turbine engine, unitized aluminum body, all the knowledge we have right now and aren't using. Not that the

manufacturers are villains; it's only that they've gotten too fat between the ears to do anything but imitate each other. The old man would hate to see that happen to the Wobbly. It's the biggest technological breakthrough since atomic energy, maybe since fire and the wheel, and he doesn't want its development slowed down just to suit people who have a vested interest in wasting our natural resources. Which people include business, labor, and government."

Holloway took out a cigarette and puffed hard. He had never taken much interest in politics; Gerrold sounded radical. "But how about the, uh, transition?" he asked. "You could throw ten million men out of work."

"Why should they work when, strictly speaking, it's waste motion? Let's cut down to a four-hour day for the same wages as now. It'll be possible once this thing is properly developed, and then everybody can have a job plus more time to be human. But the question is not political or economic, Dan, or it shouldn't be. It's a matter of the survival of civilization. We can't go on the way we are, more people and fewer resources every day. If the Wobbly can

save fuel, metal, soil, water, then it's got to be introduced as fast as humanly possible."

Holloway smoked in silence for a while. Then: "What's your second reason?"

"Well, that's a more immediately practical one. Not everybody can learn to operate these dofunnies. We flunk out about 25 percent as it is; the blasted things just won't perform for them. We've found that most of the failures are people with a basic feeling of insecurity. Down underneath, they're afraid of the Wobbly, afraid of the revolution it can bring about. And since it's bound to change the outfit they're tied in with—— You see? It's the insecure person who makes a fetish of conformity and puts himself in a nice safe job where someone else can do his worrying for him. You can't embark on a wholly new adventure without self-confidence." Gerrold grinned. "As far as we're concerned, any of our graduates can go work for the big corporations, but so far none of them have done so. They're that kind of people."

Holloway smiled rather harshly. "That may let me out," he said.

"It may," admitted Gerrold. "As a highly trained man,

you're a poor risk for us. For some reason, professional scientists and technicians seldom learn the trick of operating a Wobbly. Our best bet is the intelligent but untrained person. But we'll never understand the effect, never develop all its potentialities, without genuine scientists, so we keep trying. Every so often we succeed. I hope you'll be one of our successes."

HOLLOWAY had read the laboriously compiled dossier on Steven Wojcek, and gone back to the newspaper accounts of his failures. That was a decade ago, just after the Short War and the Red Army revolution which put men who understood war and therefore desired peace into the Kremlin. It had been too close a brush with annihilation; the world went on an emotional jag, and any sensational news unrelated to an episode best forgotten received a big play.

Wojcek had been only semi-respectable at the time. It was felt that a professor of psychology should stick to putting rats through mazes and not dabble in mathematical biophysics. But in view of the shortage of academic personnel, it could be tolerated. Then there had been some trouble—

kind not specified. And he had faded into obscurity, doing routine personnel tests for a small company and tinkering in his spare time. Until two years ago he came up with his new machine and it worked.

Holloway had expected a wild-haired figure with thick accent and gleaming eyes. Wojcek was a small man who spoke plain Midwestern English; his grizzled hair was crew cut, his eyes brown and gentle, only his rumpled suit fitted the stereotype. He shook hands in his cluttered office and took beer from a cooler.

"Sit down, Mr. Holloway, sit down," he said. "I'm mighty glad to have you with us. I hope you'll see fit to join me in research when you've graduated, we do need engineers in the worst way. We can't pay so good yet, but I think you'd enjoy it."

"There's the matter of my graduating first," said Holloway.

Wojcek tilted a beer bottle to his lips. "Aaah! Carlsberg, notice; best on this planet. If I weren't a law-abiding citizen, I'd smuggle it in; but then, I hope to see these silly tariffs abolished someday. You know, it takes as much to be a connoisseur of beer as of wine, and it's a lot cheap-

er. . . . Well, I assume you'll pass. Otherwise we've lost our money." The school was free, paid for out of the company's profits; in a business sense, it justified itself by the fact that most graduates so far stayed with the outfit, but Holloway doubted if Wojcek cared much about the financial angle.

"Well, at least I'm interested," said the engineer. "I've read all the technical papers a hundred times, and I still can't figure out how the, uh, Wobbly works."

"Neither can we." Wojcek grinned. "There's a theoretical physicist at Harvard who's developing a pretty good explanation. You'll hear about it in the lectures. Get this straight, though. It is not magic. It's a physical effect, obeying the conservation laws like anything else. We're not getting something for nothing."

Holloway asked bluntly: "How did you find it in the course of . . . psychological research?"

"Pure accident." Wojcek's smile turned wry.

After that they chatted of inconsequentials. Holloway admitted to being married, wife and two kids in New York—suburbanite, not yet promoted to the exurbs. Wojcek said it was a pity the

school didn't have room for families, but they took a two-week Christmas vacation and he could go home then. The average student needed a year to become proficient.

Holloway gnawed an inward tension. He couldn't tell Wojcek, he hadn't even told his wife. She thought he had quit his job to try something new. It was the first time he had had secrets from her, and what annoyed him most was that she had been glad he was quitting.

But you didn't countermand a vice president's suggestions.

III

THE school occupied a dozen long prefabs, dormitories, lecture halls, labs, a mess room. Holloway's quarters were small but private. His fellow students were a mixed lot, some of them from the other side of the planet, but except for a Navy man who had ideas about applying the Wojcek Effect to space rockets, they were nothing unusual. Unless . . . well, you had to admit an abnormal level of curiosity and venture-some daydreaming.

They mingled socially after hours, or went in to Des Moines for amusement. Instruction was individualized,

no more than ten people to a class. Gerrold gave the half-dozen rookies their first lectures.

He had a Wobbly on the table beside him. "You've seen these things in action," he said, "and read about them, but I'll recapitulate. Now watch those big meters on the wall behind me." He twiddled the controls and rose slowly into the air. Needles swung across figures of wattage and amperage. "You see, the energy to move me comes from the building's electrical system, though the machine isn't plugged in. Somehow the Wobbly draws power. Speaking more precisely, it applies the potential difference to the atoms of my body, so the circuit acts as if it had a motor of corresponding power hooked into it." He descended and turned the dials again. "However, for small jobs it doesn't need to use current." A paperweight rose and soared about the hall while the meters remained quiescent. "Note that I could do the same thing by carrying that object around in my hand. Biometric tests have shown that at this setting, the energy is supplied by my own body. I can feel a slight chill in myself. Naturally, under those conditions it can't do any more work than

my metabolism is able to supply."

He returned the paper-weight and leaned across the table. "That's the way we do it. Nothing mysterious, except that we don't know *how* a potential difference at Point A is made to do work at Point B. As you get more skilled, you'll become able to affect individual nucleons. Any atom with positive binding energy can be transmuted, and the mass loss can be made to do work. All the energy, mind you; no radiation hazards. You'll also be able to scan objects thousands of miles away and move them. As a simple example, you'll be able to jiggle electrons in a vacuum tube so they operate a speaker and your voice comes out—without any radio waves in between. The efficiency of such a system is obvious.

"It's clear, too, that airplanes which don't need moving parts are nearly a hundred percent efficient, and we could supply the power by transmuting dirt. Also, the plane would be accident proof. No mechanical failures. As for the human element, each ship would have two operators on the ground, spelling each other, and since those operators could scan matter through any kind of

weather—or, as far as that goes, produce smooth clear air in the vicinity of the plane—there'd be no more collisions. This is only experimental, we don't have a CAA license yet, but it'll suggest to you what can be done. Any questions?"

There were plenty.

HOLLOWAY'S first assignment was to tear down and rebuild a Wobbly—over and over, till he knew its circuits by heart.

Gerrold stopped at his workbench after three days of this. "You're learning fast," he remarked.

Holloway felt a tightness in his throat. It wouldn't do to admit how often he had been through this in the corporation laboratories. "Well, I'm used to such things," he said lamely.

Gerrold sat down on the bench, swinging his legs. "What do you think makes 'em tick?" he asked.

"I'll be damned if I know. Apparently the circuits are just a . . . a controller, some kind of electronic valve. But by all the theories of physics there's nothing they could control."

"We need new theories." Gerrold offered a cigarette. "Later on you'll study this no-

tion they're developing at Harvard. Not many of our students get to it, they don't have the math, but I think you should. Essentially, though, it involves the concept of a kind of, uh, hyperspace, through which forces can be applied orthogonally to all vectors in this universe. In our space it's ten inches or a million miles between Point A and Point B, but if you can shunt energy through hyperspace it's no distance at all. Theoretically, in a system of hyperspatial axes, any point in our universe is contiguous to any other point."

Holloway frowned. "But look, Mr. Gerrold——"

"Plain Tom is good enough for me."

"Okay. Tom. Look, you can't use word magic. 'Energy' is not a single stuff, not a genie out of a lamp. Suppose you disintegrate atoms; somehow, gamma ray quanta and kinetic energy of particles have to be transformed to mechanical work."

"Just so. Well, according to this theory—which, mind you, is still very nebulous—according to it, since hyperspatial forces are at right angles to all axes in this universe, the energy we shunt into hyperspace reappears as a difference of gravitational po-

tential. Suppose I want to lift that wrench . . . like so." Gerrold clicked over the dials on an assembled Wobbly, and the tool rose. "Our measurements show that it accelerates. It falls up, you see, because a warped-space effect has made our 'down' into its 'up.' Now we'll stop it." He turned a switch and the wrench halted and hung where it was, six feet off the ground. "What I'm doing now, if the theory is right, is to maintain a warp such that all other forces are counteracted. Actually, it isn't perfect, the wrench still has a tendency to drift on air currents, but it's close enough." Suddenly he brought the object clashing to the floor. "Here, let's see you pick it up."

Holloway started. "Me? But I——"

"You know the gadget inside out. Your own body cells will furnish the little bit of energy you'll need. Go on."

Holloway shrugged. Let's see, now—the controls were bewilderingly complex. It took a dozen of them to lift that one piece of steel, though a single cut-off switch would let it fall again. Cautiously, he set the dials as instructed and turned the positioning vernier.

The wrench did not stir.

"It takes speed," said Gerrold. "You have to set the knobs one after the other, click, click, click, and have the current exactly right all the time—or nothing happens. Try again."

Holloway set his teeth. A dim purposeless anger was rising in him. He had done this a thousand times before, back in New York, and drawn blank. For the one thousand and second try, then. . . . His fingers danced over the control board.

"Cut," said Gerrold. "I think you have the potential in the J circuit off by a millivolt or so."

"How can you tell?" snapped Holloway. "It isn't calibrated that fine."

"A guy gets the feeling of it. Once more, if you will."

Holloway glowered at the Wobbly. Elsewhere in the lab, his fellow recruits were putting down their tools and staring. It would be a hell of a note to flunk out today, under all their eyes—no, he wouldn't, usually it took several hundred rehearsals to get anywhere, but why pick on him? How the devil did Gerrold know the voltage had to be right? Maybe the frequency was more important. Maybe you succeeded or failed

because of your own built-in metabolism. There were people who couldn't work at filling stations because they just naturally picked up too much static electricity. Gerrold was being too bloody smug about an effect that no one really understood.

All right—heave!

The wrench wobbled up an inch or two, turned over, and fell.

"By God, you've got it!" Gerrold pounded his back. Holloway stared with small comprehension. He felt cold. "Go on, try again, quick!"

This time the infernal object did not move. Once more, then. It was worse than adjusting your own hi-fi set. Blasted inanimate objects... click, click, click . . . they'd get their comeuppance. Damon had not said so, but Holloway could guess what the corporation had in mind. Get one of their own men trained to operate a Wobbly—fake a few accidents—adroit publicity, stirring up the ancient human fear of the unknown—and the government would have to declare the Wojcek Effect unsafe. Licenses would be rescinded, research and development would proceed at the turtle pace which suited the big-money boys—and big-labor

boys, too, everybody big wanted to keep the status quo because maybe a new world would turn out to be bigger than himself . . . click, click, click.

Nobody was more surprised than Holloway when he lifted the wrench to the ceiling. It should have stayed there, pressed against the roof, for it was still in the machine's focus and he didn't touch a dial setting. But as he gaped upward, it fell and came within an inch of braining Gerrold. Wobblies were tricky beasts.

The instructor didn't seem to mind. Holloway learned that a rookie's first success required him to stand a round of drinks the next time everyone was in Des Moines.

SNOW came whooping over the plains, and Holloway took his turn clearing the driveway. Using a Wobbly beat using a shovel. By that time he was skilled enough to handle ordinary-sized objects with no more conscious effort or concentration than it took to drive a car. He was progressing at twice the average rate. After Christmas he would start the more delicate and exacting operations, including nuclear transmutation. He worried about that—

maybe he'd blow up half a county—till Gerrold told him that an experienced operator would be standing by to damp any reaction that showed signs of running wild.

"But how can you tell?" objected Holloway. "It happens in a matter of microseconds."

"You can, somehow," Gerrold reassured him. "You keep your hand on the tactual indicator dial. When trouble shows up . . . well, there's some kind of reflex. You stop the reaction. A moment later your brain registers a chill in your hand. A moment after that, the meters tell you what might have happened. It's like driving; if you see a car nose out of a blind intersection, you slap on your brakes without losing time in thinking about the matter."

Holloway nodded. He had acquired a great deal of respect for his body in the past months.

He dropped in on Wojcek before leaving for the holiday. The director was in his laboratory, surrounded by haywired pieces of meaningless apparatus. A chart on the wall held an odd set of symbols: Holloway recognized a pentagram and a mandala, and wondered what they were for. Probably the old guy still had this psychic bug—though

why he did, when a new world of authentic science was open to him, was hard to understand. Well, Newton had been a mystic too.

"Good to see you, Dan."

Wojcek wrung his hand. "In a few months, maybe, you'll join me here. I need a good assistant, or if my line of work doesn't interest you you can try something else. Anything that appeals to you. And the hell with whether there's money in it or not. We just want to learn."

"What are you working on?" asked Holloway curiously.

"The communications aspect. We can already use the Wobbly to transmit vocal messages, or operate a teletype, but why not brain-to-brain? After all, when you perceive a message, what's really happening is a physical process in your head. Why shouldn't we generate the process directly, without going through the ear or the eye?"

Holloway laughed. "Telepathy yet!"

"That's not a respectable word." Wojcek grinned back. "We'll call it something like encephalic resonance, then we can't be slandered. Have you been studying the Harvard hypothesis about the effect?"

"Yes. Frankly, I don't think much of it. Too many postulates."

"Me, too," said Wojcek. "But if it makes them happy, what the hell?"

As he rode to Des Moines, Holloway felt a curious depression. Not that he didn't want to see his wife and kids—Lord, it seemed like forever!—but there was something about the school.

Maybe just the fact that he didn't have to wear a tie and didn't have to call one solitary living soul "chief."

IV

DAMON knocked the ash from his cigar with great care. "So you really can do it," he murmured.

"Uh-huh." Holloway looked out at the iron-gray winter sky of New York. Mass-production Christmas blinked at him from a hundred store windows. "It took me a while to get the knack, before then I was positively dangerous to have around, but now it's easy. As far as I've gone with it, anyway."

"What does it feel like? I've heard it's supposed to feel odd."

"It does. I can't really describe it. You can't operate a machine at all till you're so

skilled that you don't have to look at the meters . . . consciously, anyhow. You just do what's right without thinking about it. I'll give you a for instance, one of my lessons. I used a Wobbly——"

"A what did you say, boy?"

"Wobbly. That's what we . . . they call it."

"I *knew* they were subversive! Go on, Dan. Give it to me straight from the shoulder."

"Well, the idea was, we had a small winged missile, with no engines, and I was supposed to fly it by remote control, out of visual range. There was a TV camera in its nose, giving me a view. But as long as I watched that screen, I couldn't do a thing. Finally I got mad, cussed it . . . and all of a sudden realized I had it in the air. My eyes went back to the screen, and I lost control. Regained it, though, before there was a crash, and put the missile through its paces. Those included looping it around a set of pylons. The screen showed them to me, but I swear I wasn't watching the screen . . . somehow, I *felt* those pylons, like a blind man feels a hand in front of his face, only more clearly. I had a sense of vector relationships, as if I were part of the missile—— There's no word to describe

the feeling. But I wasn't watching that screen!"

"You must have been, off and on," said Damon doubtfully. "Eyes flickering back and forth."

"Well, I suppose so."

"Take it from me, Dan. The good old subconscious. Just turn it loose. Someday when you sit in on a conference, you'll know what I mean."

Holloway started.

Damon smiled. "Well, I can't say yet, Dan. There'll be a nice big bonus for you in all events and there might, there just might be an executive vacancy when you wind up this little chore."

Holloway wondered why he didn't feel happier about it.

"Tell you what, boy," said Damon chummily. "J. B. is giving a party Saturday night. I won't hide it from you, he's got his eye on you. You and your wife come too. You know the place? Eight o'clock."

"Thanks." Holloway calculated rapidly. He'd have to cancel the neighborhood poker party he'd figured on. Rent a tux . . . damn, but he hated stiff collars! He thought Joan would pass muster; she was only a little Oregon girl and didn't know all the latest, and a wife could make or break a young executive, but he

thought she would get by. Trouble was, he didn't know the current rules. Did eight o'clock mean eight on the nose if you stood at the bottom of the pecking order? He'd have to find out——

Damon watched him narrowly. "You've changed, Dan," he said. "I know you've got a lot to chew over, but don't lose the old enthusiasm. Keep your eye on the big picture. We want men who can sit on the Team."

Holloway mumbled something ending in "chief" and got away. His Buick was waiting at the garage, and he threaded a way between Santa Clauses toward his home. Better get rid of this car; Damon drove the same model. Might start looking at the real estate ads, too . . . right address, very important——

In Iowa they didn't give a damn where you lived.

HOLLOWAY took the bus from Des Moines and got off at the school. A number of his fellow students were with him, but he gave their greetings a short reply. He couldn't understand the sullenness within himself. Maybe it was just leaving Joan. She had tried not to cry, but hadn't quite made it.

Well, in another six months the apprentice wobbler

or so he'd finish this miserable business and return home for good.

He unpacked and spent a lonesome evening reading in a corner of the lounge. Gerrold came up to him and said hello, and though the man's manner was affable enough, Holloway had a sudden impression of hostility.

Probably nothing but his own overworked imagination. Nerves.

But the next day, and the following week, he could not see why his assignments were merely repetitious of what he already knew. And he grew increasingly certain that for some reason, Tom Gerrold had it in for him.

THE payoff came in mid-January.

On a morning of frost and gloom, after a night with small sleep, Holloway lost his temper. He had been told to fly around that day, practicing the techniques of soaring and of maintaining an envelope of warm air next to his skin. It must be man's oldest dream, this flying, born with the first half-ape who watched a bird and knew wistfulness, still alive in the present day when you outpaced the birds but were locked in metal. Ordinarily its realiza-

tion soothed and exalted him. But not today.

He hovered above the clouds, seeing their gray turned to a blinding blue-shadowed white, alone with sky and silence. But it was not for him, not now. He was no angel, he was a man with a man's work to do, and Gerrold was keeping him in kindergarten.

Holloway blasphemed and twirled the controls of his Wobbly. Down through the clouds, a moment of whirling mist and then the plains barren with snow, the school buildings rushing to meet him—in through the window!

Wojcek started, almost dropping a piece of blown glass. "Hey, there!" For the first time, Holloway saw him annoyed. "What the hell's going on? I'm busy."

"And I'm not. That's exactly the trouble." Holloway set the Wobbly down and went stiff-legged across the floor.

"Oh . . . it's you, Dan. You look like the wrath to come. What's the matter?"

"I came here to learn. Nobody's teaching me."

"I'd say you've learned quite a bit," answered Wojcek dryly.

"Sure, sure. But there's more. A hell of a lot more. And ever since I got back, all

I've been allowed to do is go over and over what I already know. What's the big idea?"

Wojcek scratched his head. "Don't ask me," he said defensively. "Maybe Tom feels you're not quite ready to start something new. He's in charge of instruction, you know. Not my department at all."

"I don't have anything against practice," said Holloway. "But this stupid business is something else again. It's like making me say the multiplication table every day. I'll take any test you want to give me—but damn and blast it, there's no point in my staying here under these conditions!"

Wojcek looked puzzled and worried. "Frankly, Dan, I believe you—and I don't understand it either. Why not talk to Tom? If there's some argument—well——" He seemed almost frightened, a little man dismayed at the idea of being kicked from his orderly world of inanimate energies into the riotous plane where humankind lived. Hell of a judge he'd make, thought Holloway.

"All right," he mumbled. "I'll see him. Sorry to have bothered you."

He picked up his Wobbly and went out. Gerrold was

standing in the muddy snow just beyond the door.

"I——" began Holloway.

"I know. You don't like the way you're being treated." Gerrold's lip lifted. There was no mistaking the hatred in his eyes. "I was wondering how long it'd take you to get up the nerve."

He turned on his heel. "This way. We'll find a private spot."

Holloway followed in bewilderment. The Wobbly dragged at his arm. They went behind a dormitory, no one in sight, ten miles of open white plain on the other side. Gerrold stopped.

"I was just marking time," he said. "Trying to decide what to do with you. I'm still not sure—except that you're certainly not going to be taught anything more!"

"What are you talking about?" The quiet, persistent cold seemed to gnaw under Holloway's jacket.

"What do you think?" Gerrold jammed his fists into his pockets as if afraid of what they might do. "You've already got too much knowledge to take back to that filthy outfit you're spying for."

Holloway felt as if he had been hit in the stomach. "Look here——" he stuttered.

"I have looked." Gerrold

laughed with scant mirth. "There were a lot of things about you that didn't add up. And of course I never expected the other side to take this lying down. You aren't the first spy they've sent here. But all the others flunked out. You didn't, worse luck! I scanned your movements when you went back to New York. I looked into your friend Damon's mind. The whole scheme is there, the faked experiments and faked accidents to come. Don't bother denying it."

FOR a moment, the only thing that registered was one chance phrase. *I looked into your friend Damon's mind.* It smashed a universe.

Gerrold shook his head. "No. I can't read yours. You're a high-potential psionist . . . something in your genes, we don't know yet what it is, but you've got a powerful talent. And your psychological blocs weren't strong enough to nullify it, as they do for so many people."

His eyes would not let go of Holloway's. He spoke tonelessly. "Yes, the inherent ability varies. But we believe every human has it to some degree. A new mutation, perhaps, the next step upward . . . that's the real purpose of

this group, to give everybody the power. And you'd hold up the program for the next hundred years, if you can. And by that time civilization may very easily have broken under its own weight, there won't be any analytical techniques to force the development of psi, man may have to wait half a million years for natural evolution to bring it out. And perhaps he won't be given that much time."

"But then——" Holloway lifted his hands, as if to fend off a blow. "But look here—why——"

"The old man has had enough troubles," said Gerrold. "Can you comprehend the idea of a decent human being? That's what Steve Wojcek is. It nearly broke him, ten years ago, when he was called a liar to his face. I don't want him to know that his most promising student actually is a liar and a thief. That's why I've been stalling, trying to think of some way out of this mess. And now you've brought it to a head, and I'm just as glad!"

Holloway straightened himself. "All right," he said woodenly. "I'll go."

"It's not that easy, mister," replied Gerrold. "You already have enough technique to do your boss' work for him. I've

never killed a man before, but——"

Holloway snatched up the Wobbly. "Take it easy!" he gasped.

Gerrold chuckled. "Go ahead. Fly away if you can."

V

HIS heart was thunder and fury, sweat was cold in the cold windless air, the thing which was Tom Gerrold had too much mystery to be faced. Holloway spun the dials. He lifted a yard, and something like a troll's invisible hand closed on him and pressed him back to earth.

"You see," said Gerrold mildly, "the Wobbly is a fake. Hold still!" Holloway tried to run, and found he could not, it was like being caught in a mesh of rubber.

"Don't get scared," said Gerrold scornfully. "I'm not going to murder you after all. Too many inhibitions, I suppose."

Reaction set in. The nervous system can stand only so many shocks, then it protects itself by apathy . . . or by responding to some wholly different stimulus. Odd, thought Holloway, all at once his only emotion was an overwhelming curiosity.

"The Wobbly is a fake," he repeated.

"Sure. Ever hear about Maelzel's chess-playing machine? Turned out that there was a man inside it. Same thing." Gerrold smiled, almost amiably. "That was Steve Wojcek's stroke of genius."

He leaned against the wall and spoke in a casual, drawling voice. "You see, as far as we've been able to discover, psi works much as the Wobbly is supposed to, by tapping energies and applying them. Except that it's not a machine, but a nervous system, which is the agent. Don't ask me how; that's one thing we're still trying to understand.

"But being essentially a psychological phenomenon, psi follows psychological laws. And one of those laws is this: if you really, sincerely believe you can't do something, if you've hypnotized yourself into believing you're unable—then you can't. Consider hysterical paralysis, or any psychosomatic disorder."

"I begin to see——" whispered Holloway.

"I thought you would," nodded Gerrold. "Now ten years ago, Wojcek was pretty well convinced that such phenomena do exist. And they do, you know. Therefore

his experiments worked—for him. But the scientists who tested his claims . . . well, they probably were open-minded enough, tried to be fair, but subconsciously they had too strong a conditioning. Psi had too bad a name, smacked too much of charlatanism. If true, it would be too hard to fit into their concept of natural law. And a nice, tidy universe with all the loose ends put up in pretty bows is necessary to the emotional security of some people.

"So the experiments did not work for them. Nor would they work for Steve in the presence of the others; so much negation was bound to swamp his own psi output. So he was bounced out on his can.

"But now, when he makes no claims about psionic effects, when he merely shows a machine which is alleged to work on some new *physical* principle, nobody gets rattled. We're used to new discoveries in physics.

"The Wobbly is not an absolute fake. It's a useful teaching tool. It helps you focus your mind, instills the conviction you must have to use your psionic ability. And it helps to get emotionally upset the first few times you use that talent—see all the accounts of poltergeist phe-

nomena. So the Wobbly's controls are designed to be infuriating. Therefore, if your subconscious hasn't been too bridled and blinkered, if you aren't too afraid of newness, your own powers are released.

"We'll reveal the fraud later, when the Wojcek Effect has been accepted. When it's so commonplace that an explanation in terms of psychics rather than of physics won't shock anyone, will in fact merely bore the average man. But right now we can't."

THERE followed a stillness. Winter crackled in the air. Holloway found himself thinking of coal. Every year, millions of tons were burned just to heat houses, coal which ought to be used as a starting point for organic syntheses. With psionic powers, you wouldn't need a furnace, you could draw sunlight from the Sahara region and—

And he was still Gerrold's prisoner.

"Why are you telling me this?"

"An experiment." Gerrold spread his hands. "Go on, I'm not holding you. Fly away—if you can!"

Holloway looked at the Wobbly. Fake, fake, fake, a

useless clutter of tubes and wires; an hour ago he had been sitting on empty air with nothing between him and the ground but the power of his own mind. Suppose he had made a slip?

"I thought so." Gerrold's smile broadened, still without humor. "Go on home. Tell 'em what I've told you, if you like. Nobody will believe it."

He turned and walked out of sight, around the building.

Holloway stood for a while, shaking.

No, wait . . . what was he afraid of?

If he'd been able to fly, or move matter, or scan objects a thousand miles removed—if he could do that once, burdened with a crutch, why not now, when he knew the crutch was not needed?

How do you fly?

He stood with teeth jammed together, hands slippery from sweat, and willed himself into the air. There was not a sound, not a stirring, the earth gripped him and would not let go.

Remembering himself alone under the sun was like a knife.

Goddam Tom Gerrold!

When the mist of rage cleared from his eyes, he realized that he was a good fifty feet above ground.

For a moment fear was terrible within him, and he turned end over end and fell toward extinction. Then, somehow, from somewhere, the knowledge came back and he was moving alone. He did not *will* himself above the clouds, any more than he would will himself to walk up a flight of stairs. He simply decided to rise, and his body rose. When a feeling of chill warned him that he was draining his own metabolism too fast, his senses ranged out, found a power line, and drew the energy to lift him further.

Then he dove, shouting like a boy.

Gerrold was in Wojcek's lab, doubtless handing the old man some story to explain his star pupil's quitting. His face was comical when Holloway came in the window.

"My God!" he said in a strangled voice. "You can!"

"Sure." Holloway leaned against the workbench, utterly at ease. "Can't keep a good man down."

"But——"

"Don't worry, Tom. I've changed my mind." Holloway looked at the pentagram and the mandala on the wall.

"Steve, let's face it. I came here as a spy and saboteur for my company. The plan was to end your operations. But it's too big, there's too much to do. I'd like to move my family out here . . . go on studying . . . join you, if I may——"

Gerrold gaped, but Wojcek nodded. "I was wondering when this would happen," he replied.

"What?" Holloway and Gerrold said it together.

Wojcek grinned at them. "Look, boys, I'm not quite the unworldly old geezer you think. I knew very well that sooner or later a high-potential psionist would get in here on behalf of our enemies. I spotted you the minute I saw you, Dan. But what the hell? You couldn't pass this course unless you were pretty free from basic insecurity, unless you had a real desire to know. And that's precisely the type of man we need here, and the type who won't be able to stay away. I only hope your ex-boss sends us some more." He started toward his office.

"Come on, let's crack a few bottles of beer. There are some things psi will never replace—and Carlsberg is one of them!"

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**nor
the moon
by night**

GAVIN HYDE

NOON seemed the darkest time of day in the Municipal Library of Science.

Everyone, knowing it was
nor the moon by night



daytime, would look up from the suddenly gray print and wonder what happened to the columns of ivy-edged yellow-

ness that had lanced down from the high windows moments before. In the morning and afternoon there would be colors, faces, glaring pages, but now there was no light to expose motion. The chairs, tables and bookshelves presented their most polished edges to the dimness. So it was, at this time of day, that a visitor would have noticed against the east wall a long bank of lustrous metal boxes with people darkly silhouetted in front in various attitudes of attention. If, at that instant, lights should have exploded into being and a band had scattered a few bars of music and some bells had rung, the people might have been playing at a row of one-armed bandits.

But the scene hung flatly silent as a tapestry against the wall. The figures weren't waving their arms about, and they were all wearing ear-phones.

There was a man—call him a man—whose name was Paul Andrist and who was there, thinking.

He was thinking of himself again, how he must seem to the people who came in to play chess with him. It could have been vain—wondering what they thought of his profile, but for Andrist it was

just more of the same desperate evaluation of position in life.

In life! No, position in death. The aspect of Paul Andrist, master chessplayer, described not in terms of bony hooked nose, wide brow, muscled chin. That was the clay they talked of in poetry, dust to dust returneth.

But he still had his clay. Was there a difference now that he had a flat steel face instead of one of flesh?

The mouth was still there, a dark little slot where the quarter came down and rang a bell, slamming against his "eardrums" like a glancing boulder.

And his skull, architecturally square now and bald—what could be more bald?—but still admitting the tubes which brought him nourishment, cradling the fetid soup around the mind.

He had one useless eye, which must have given him the look of a Cyclops. That was the clock that reminded his opponent that checkmate must be achieved before the half hour passed. Many were the games he had won from visiting chessmasters because they would have had to put in another quarter to think a bit.

He had a voice box too: a foot square and electronic as

anything! Never had a sore throat in his life (that is, his death).

And while he was counting his blessings, how many people lived in a million-dollar house? With neighbors like the late First - man - on - the - moon - Forest Berensen, old Dr. Life - in - a - Testube - Rogers, the lamented P. L. Durkee, who drove across the Atlantic seabottom in a jeep, or something. And more. Fourteen of them, wasn't it?

There they were, bolted down, stewing in their own juice, some wishing a friend would come along and plug in the earphones, others for an earthquake that might bring down the building—or at least rupture a tiny pulsing (but vital) nerve.

AS HE had done so often before, Andrist took a deep breath and whammed his fist on a table. He gave the order.

But there was no tension in the lungs, no crashing of furniture, since there was neither lung nor fist.

There was just the imagined hiss of fourteen soup bowls, the consciousness of plum-pudding dark wood in the silent noon in the cool building and far away the known rumble of file cabinets

nor the moon by night

and the remembered squeak of tennis shoes under the chair of the student and the brought-to-mind newspaper flap, clink of drinking-fountain handle.

If you could haul off and hit!

If you could cry tears!

But how could he have known? When he had gone to the Society, without conceit, knowing that he had progressed beyond certain limits of his contemporaries in the game of chess?

He remembered that when he had investigated the mind-library process he had been prepared for a cutting away of all except the chess mind and he had been resigned that his death at the end of life would be his real death.

It had not been that way, though! There was too much of the self left, the non-existent muscles reaching out to brush the hair out of a child's eyes.

So he had asked them Wednesday during the check-up if they might let him join his bones. After all, now Engstrom, untouchable at the board as Andrist had been in his day, had found significant defects in Andrist's theory. Okay, that was chess, but now he should be able to go.

They were very sorry. He

had to wait until Engstrom was ready to take his place, it was in the contract. And had Engstrom agreed to do that? Yes, he was checking in monthly at the lab already.

That had been no comfort. There was no telling how long Engstrom would live. Engstrom was sixty, and people live to be over a hundred sometimes. A man of sixty had years and years. In the sun, waving, in the shower stamping and roaring.

And what if, in such a shower, the soap slid down from the dish while Engstrom was washing his hair, down the wall, over to the foot, and he took a new stance?

On his head?

The lab might be only five blocks away, but it might as well be five hundred miles, if the brain itself were damaged.

This half-death forever?

ANDRIST felt a quarter penetrate the slot, slither past the magnets, and he steeled himself:

BONG!

"Good afternoon," he said, when he had recovered.

"It's me again, Mr. Andrist." The wonderful voice.

It was John Plum, a fifteen-year-old who was fast becoming a competent player. More

than that, he had the charm of being able to give unprejudiced answers to questions of the type that Andrist liked to ask.

"Good. Glad to hear you, John. You had black last time."

"Pawn to Queen four."

"Knight to King's Bishop three."

They always started with short greetings and he tried to wait before he began asking. But today was different. For three days he had been measuring the years that lay ahead of Engstrom like rooms full of people, touches, tastes.

And his own years, bluishless, imprisoned as in a sea cave, covered on every side by the rigid shell and the clean stone underneath.

"What did you say?" said John.

"I was wondering if you had a root beer over in the store before you came in."

"Bishop to Knight five. Sure. As always."

Andrist asked greedily: "What do you mean, 'as always'? Sort of heavy and cool? With the icewater running off the bottle?"

"You mean—oh, I see," said the boy. "Yes, Mr. Andrist. And then I felt the ribbed bottle under my lips and the glass ticking against my

teeth. I tried to let all of it fall in one swallow, but the last part went down my chin and I rubbed off the drops with the back of my hand."

"Yes, yes!"

"Your move."

His move. If only he could! "Knight to King five." Then he tensed, bringing the muscles to the crystal ridge on the bottle, to drink.

He could have done it before. He could have done a lot of things. How many times had he been sitting in a smoke-filled hall waiting for his opponent to push a pawn, and seen the rumple-haired boys coming back from the courts with streaked faces and tennis rackets under their arms? Looking out of the window, he had seen the leaves trembling on the olive trees in Italy, the precise step of a fur-fringed donkey in Cuba, the pine needles sawing in Oregon.

But he had never touched them.

The unbearable longing had come too late.

One could not escape from the sixty-four square order. He had traced gambits on his wife's shoulder blades, God rest her soul. He was like a fistfighter who, upon entering a ballroom, must shuffle the same old dance of advance,

nor the moon by night

retreat, and make almost imperceptible movements across his chest with both hands, relaxed but ready to strike.

Not that he hadn't made the usual promises to himself.

He used to be in the dark beside the pinstripe wallpaper of a one-night room on the tournament loop and promise.

"When the children come, then the picnics, the circus. . . ." Sometimes he was afraid he had said it aloud and he would lean over his wife's face to see if she had heard. "Stop thinking about it, dear," she'd say, "I'm sure you'll win." Then he would dream, a child's footsteps on the stairs turning into the dull click and thud of felt-bottomed chessmen in rooms the color of cigars, among the bleary-eyed men in shirt-sleeves.

JOHN said: "I think this move will save the Knight. Rook takes Rook."

Andrist did not answer. He felt another question coming, a group of rivulets wild in his head, joining each other, overflowing from thought into speech. He felt fear now, when a man in his situation couldn't possibly fear anything.

"Baseball season still on?"

"Sure. Want to hear about the bats again?"

"Oh! I didn't mean to make you—" he said. Then, begging: "Anything."

"Name it, Mr. Andrist."

"The mitt," said Andrist.

"Let's see. I told you at the beginning of the season how the ball stings through it. Well, you know how a new mitt feels, sort of like sticking your hand into the armpit of a horse, padded and smooth, and it's usually light colored, but after you play with it a while it gets darker and darker inside as the sweat sinks in and the darker it gets, the cooler it gets, kind of. A new mitt's hot." Andrist heard the quick, hard breaths of the boy.

"Then your hand, even though it's smooth, begins to wear against the inside leather until there are tufts and tabs sticking up all over. When you first put it on in the afternoon it feels encrusted like a scab. Then if you play a little pepper the sweat gets into the nap. You can swing your hand around and that mitt's still on. It clings to you."

"I see," said Andrist, with an effort. And another question nudged him. But if he asked it there would be more, would there not?

So he did something that he had never done before in his life. Intentionally, he moved his Queen into danger.

"I don't see it," John said.

"What?"

"The reason for the sacrifice."

He tried to make it sound convincing. "What? Oh, blasted oversight! But you know I never take moves back."

"I've never beaten you, Mr. Andrist. You *have* to take it back!"

"On the contrary," Andrist said desperately, "I resign! You just took me. That's chess. And it's a free half-hour of course—just wave to the girl at the desk."

"That's no win."

"Nonsense!" He waited for the boy to signal, listening.

"Okay, Mr. Andrist. She cut us in for another period, but I still wish you'd take your Queen back."

For a moment Andrist wavered. No. He must hurry, not think. The mitt! What was the use? This reaching. His mind hummed, groaned in its way when he heard these things. He was frantic putty! Curds. Rotten cauliflower.

"John, I want to ask you to do something for me."

"Sure, Mr. Andrist."
"Kill me."

PAUSE. Then the boy's voice, doubtfully:

"Pardon?"

"Don't you see? Wait. I'm going too fast for you. You know me, don't you John? You know exactly what I am. You can come in and drop your quarter in the slot and speak to me, but I'm not really alive. I said kill me. But it wouldn't be murder, because I'm already dead. Do you see?"

"No. What is it?"

"Look. I came here because I wanted to. The point is I can't go. I want to go. I lived my life, got myself immortality with the excuse that my chess knowledge was worth saving. There's nothing about me that's worth saving. What do I ask from you? More life. And I don't deserve it. There's Engstrom now."

"You must know what you're doing when you describe things to me! So what's the use of nursing me any more? Look at it objectively. You'd be doing something that I want you to do. Your conscience would be clear."

"Yeah, but . . . you sound crazy, Mr. Andrist! Why all of a sudden this depression?

You don't really want to die?"

"Die! I'm telling you, I'm dead. Ten years ago they made a machine, and my brain is just a part of it. Have you ever broken a toy? Or gotten mad because a watch wouldn't run and just tapped it on the table a little too hard?"

"All right. I admit I know what you're talking about. We're friends, Mr. Andrist. But I can't kill you. My chess partner."

"Exactly, just a chess opponent, and the thing can be carried out as logically as checkmate, with as little emotion."

"You forget that I've never checkmated you. How would I do it? Not that I'm going to, but theoretically."

He had the boy going. But the way would have to be perfect.

"To me you're just thick steel," John said. "I don't mean personally, but for the purposes of—of—"

Unless the method left not the slightest trace, there would be danger of the museum authorities apprehending John. It was none of their business, but he knew that they would never understand or believe John if he tried to tell them that the chessmas-

ter had ordered it. That ruled out drilling, hammering, explosive, and all the related violences.

A radioactive dose would be too difficult.

Then he had it. Just as easy as plugging in a floor lamp! Certainly if he were electrocuted they would blame it on a short circuit in the machine. There couldn't be an investigation with suspicion of murder, because there would be no conceivable motive.

"Yes," he said, "but John, this metal that you can touch is connected to more metal and that in turn rests on more and finally *I* touch it from inside here. All you have to do is get an extension cord, wait in the washroom until they close the place up, come over here and—I don't know how far the wall plug is from here."

"About twelve feet. However," said John.

"Good! Plug in and give this contraption about a minute of juice. Roll up the wire and hide it somewhere. Call the number of the information desk from around the corner by the checking-out desk, and let it ring until the night watchman comes in and answers it. He won't bother to lock the door just for the minute that he'll be on the phone,

and while he's around there in the next hall you can walk out. You can come back and remove the extension cord some other day."

He paused. There was no more to say. "John? We don't have to be sentimental with each other!"

John was pleading now. "But what difference does it make how simple it is? I'd do it for you if it were *only* dangerous! It's just that I don't believe . . . I come in to play chess with you and perhaps tell you some of the things that you like to hear, and you ask me to end it. . . ."

"Because you *are* the only one I can ask! Because you're close enough so that you've had to see some of my misery! I'm no more than an old phonograph, after the years have seen every record broken but one! A kindness, John!"

And the word "kindness" echoed hollowly in his mind, loudly and then softly until he thought perhaps he was talking to no one, that he had scared John away. He waited. He heard a breath.

"Then good-by, Mr. Andrist."

He wasn't sure of the boy's meaning, but to the last he had to keep drawing him with confidence. "Tonight."

"I—yes, all right. Tonight."

THE late afternoon sun was staring against the marble of the outside wall, jumping from there through the wide air inside the library, coming to rest against the metal and finally seeping through. He wished he couldn't imagine it so well. He wanted to think darkness, evening with clouds over the moon, night under a dense tree, because time was of himself now.

It no longer mattered whether or not his time agreed with that of every swinging wristwatch out on the street. For him there was only one more appointment. He wanted to bring it to himself instantly. He could see death coming like a checkmate: there was no difference between a time before checkmate and the moment of the final stroke, was there? So what was time? The end was implicit in the now.

As a chessplayer, he could find only hard logic between the two.

But as a man he wanted to see noon, then the morning sun, and after that dawn, and after that. . . .

Because he had cheated himself of self-portraits. Other men carried theirs, accumulated through years of vacillation, a waywardness of purpose that Andrist had

hated, but which he now longed for, though it was too late.

He had been like the others once, free to measure by touch the pockets, the new images into which one is constantly reborn. But even in his earliest memories he had begun with un-childlike method to burn the nerve-ends. To close all avenues to risk.

Like, for instance, he remembered, the time he was visiting the little Polish girl.

Her hair was so long it hung down the silver handlebars of her tricycle. She was very rich, and she had wheeled across the firm red rug of the living room floor and stopped in front of him with her feet still slightly pressing on the pedals. And he and she were suddenly huge. In the middle of the wide rug, with the voices of the adults from out in the garden creeping at the windows, they were giant and giantess. He had stepped forward and pressed his lips into her cheek and felt her hair thickly alive on his forehead. But the tricycle moved and he saw her riding quickly away, wiping her face with her tiny fingers. She had looked very small then, and the grownups' voices began to rattle the

spindly doors of the antique cabinet that loomed beside him.

He had waited for his mother and father in the car.

He remembered again:

There was the pigeon he had got for his birthday, a heavy thing with fluttering heart that he had held in his hand. Slim as an ivory shoe-horn, it pecked and tottered back and forth on its rice-kernel toes for the first few days and then stopped and stood still for a day and a half with its tail hanging, until, puffed and dirtied, eyes half gray, it died.

There were few things that he remembered with this unique vividness after he learned chess. While still a boy, he had become cautious in life, daring in chess. Perhaps the last was the pale blue morning on which he flung himself from his bed and ran through the wet grass to the pepper tree to cut himself a fishing pole. He had been thinking about it all night. He had never been fishing. The pepper tree wasn't so good for poles as he had imagined, but he couldn't change his mind and he got a scraggly limb and carved off the bark with his knife. Then he tied the end of his ball of string to the tip of the pole and be-

gan playing it out, walking backwards, over the lawn, through a hole in the stone wall, past the tool shed and finally down into the vegetable garden, where he tied on a safety pin. He dug up a fresh carrot and embedded the hook in it, placing it in the ground conspicuously between two rows of lettuce. Then he had taken the long way around the house to his pole under the pepper tree, to wait for the rabbits to bite. With lungs stinging in the cold air, he had held his pole against the morning stars until they disappeared. With the sun came the gardener, who, slapping his knees, went up to the house to tell the story.

He had vowed that he would never again fish for rabbits.

THAT was what made it comforting now to Andrist to be near the end of it.

Soon it would be impossible for him to fish any more, with or without illusions. He knew that he would never be able to stop desiring; on the other hand it was too late to become a fifteen-year-old John Plum. Between these there was only one safe place for the heart—where nothing could touch it. In death. So black as to be devoid of darkness, silent as

fission, slow as light in its journey to the end of space.

There was sound—low at first, but mounting like a siren. John!

It was metallic, as if the mechanism around him had begun to shear and twist. A jingling, rhythmic sound began to shake him. He felt as though he had a real head again and someone were hitting him along the temples with a sack of silver dollars. And then he was sinking and the clean noise of air things stopped and there was the low cough of surf in caves. He was in a crowd of deep bubbles. One by one they ruptured, the leaden noise coming closer and closer with each explosion, until he knew that the next one would be all.

It would be over. He lost thought in the blast.

Nothing.

Wait.

Silence.

Death?

"Hm?" He had a voice!

"I am Paul Andrist," he said. Then he thought, "Oh, don't be such a bloody fool!"

And waited in the hush, longer.

Then as he let his memory spread and his thoughts whirled away from their fear-inspired closeness, he knew, he saw. He was filled instantly

with dark hate. It was treachery, a . . . trick! And it was so——

Funny!

He laughed momentarily, as suddenly moaned wretchedly.

Because he still heard the firs hissing in Oregon, and felt the faintly moist eyelid of the beautiful young girl against his cheekbone. It was all there, and more, in the loud darkness! Clumping bats, thudding balls, whacking diving boards, chattering skiis, a fox trot, an ice cream cone with a mushy bottom, neighbor kids calling, a kite with tugging string diving round and round——

And he should have known, should he not? Because death is implicit in life. He had said it. Just as checkmate is implicit in any given position on the chessboard. Nothing changes until the players pick up the pieces and start a new game.

But as he waited there surprised and left wondering even by death, he was filled with a strange satisfaction: How much more terrible it would have been if he had brought nothing with him! The emptiness of death cries to be filled! For the first time, he turned happily to his desires, ghostly and meagre as

they now seemed to be in the vastness of death. He wished he could somehow tell John about it.

HE HAD almost slept. Then he heard the voice.

"Hello, Andrist! Are you all right? This is Dr. Williams—the janitor called me down here because the alarm was flashing on the switchboard. Have you felt anything?"

It was like a hot bath, driving up your own driveway at two o'clock in the morning.

A hundred and ten volts had not been enough, then!

"I'm—I seem to be all right, Doctor!" he said.

"Indeed! You're bursting my eardrums," said the doctor. "Well, good night, Mr. Andrist."

"Pleasant dreams to *you*, Doctor," said Andrist. "And Doctor, have them give me an early call, will you please?"

"Certainly."

Two or three lights were shining from the high ceiling of the Municipal Library of Science at a surprisingly late hour that night and three kids on their way home from the last movie were left not a little curious by a sight that

could be seen through the after-hours book return slot: A large, bespectacled man in a white smock and a boy were filling a burlap bag. They put in a baseball bat, several lengths of heavy chain, a bugle, an egg beater and finally, with some difficulty, a battered garbage can top. The younger one shouldered the bag and the man walked to the switchbox on the wall and turned out the lights.

The kids ran behind a hedge and presently the man and the boy came through the doors. They paused on the steps.

"I did the right thing?" The boy was asking, not stating. After all, he was only fifteen years old.

"You did the right thing, John." The older one hefted the bag of sound effects. "I think he thought he was dead. But he sounded—he sounded very good, John. I'm glad you came to me. I'm glad you didn't help him to die." He shouldered the bag. "Still," he said, "it's too bad he can't see those stars."

The boy stared at the sky. Then he said, "He's looking at them now," and stepped out toward the sidewalk.

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